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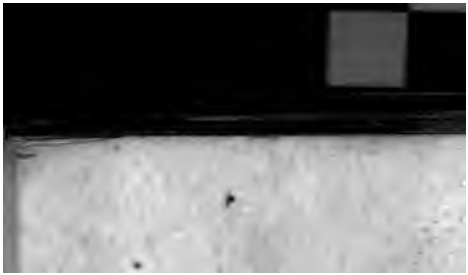

WENTY DISCOURSES,

ON THE MOST

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,

CALCULATED FOR

VERY CLASS OF READERS.

BY

ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

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THE SERMONS contained in the following Selection, are, properly speaking, abridgments of the original. These abridgments, however, have not been effected by a curtailment of any thing important, but by the omission of what is less so. The controversial style of preaching which prevailed in the days of ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON, renders his discourses (though abounding with information to the professed theologian) tedious and less interesting to the general reader. No person, however, can have attentively read them, and observed the admirable manner in which the principles of Religion are therein presented to the understanding, and its practice urged upon the conscience of men, without feeling a wish for the means of rendering them more extensively known and useful. To afford these means is the object of *the present work*. By any one, who will be at *the trouble of* comparing the first Sermon in

OR 20 JUN 34

SERMON X.
The Folly and Danger of Irresolution and Delaying..... 1

SERMON XI.
The Distinguishing Character of a Good and Bad Man..... 1

SERMON XII.
The Parable of the Ten Virgins..... 1

SERMON XIII.
The Care of our Souls, the one Thing needful..... 1

SERMON XIV.
That God is the only Happiness of Man.. 2

SERMON XV.
Of the Advantages of an Early Piety..... 2

SERMON XVI.
Against Evil Speaking..... 2

SERMON XVII.
Objections against the True Religion answered..... 2

SERMON XVIII.
A Persuasive to frequent Communion..... 2

SERMON XIX.
The Nature and Influence of the Promises of the Gospel..... 2

SERMON XX.
On Sincerity..... 3

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE WISDOM OF BEING RELIGIOUS.

JOB, xxviii. 28.

And unto Man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.

To *fear the Lord*, and *to depart from evil*, are phrases which the Scripture uses to express THE SUM OF RELIGION, AND THE WHOLE OF OUR DUTY. And because the large usage of these two phrases is to be the foundation of my following discourse, I shall endeavour to show:

First, That the whole of religion is frequently expressed, in Scripture, by these and ich like phrases: And,

Secondly, How fit these two phrases are to scribe religion.

I. It is very usual in the language of Scripe, to express the whole of religion by some inent principle, or part, of religion. The it *principles* of religion are, knowledge, *remembrance*, love, and fear; by all

which the Scripture uses to express the WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

In the Old Testament—by the knowledge, remembrance, and fear of God.—Thus in Proverbs, religion is called *the knowledge of the Holy*, Prov. xxx. 3. and wicked men are by Jeremiah described to be such as *know not God*, Jer. x. 25.—In the book of Job, in the Psalms, and in Proverbs, the fear of the Lord is frequently taken for the whole of our duty: And in Ecclesiastes, is expressly said to be the sum of religion; *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*, Eccl. xii. 13. On the contrary, the wicked are described to be such as *have not the fear of God before their eyes*, Ps. xxxvi. 1. In the same sense we find the remembrance of God used; *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, Eccl. xii. 1; that is, enter upon a religious course betimes: and the Psalmist makes it the character of the wicked, that they forget God; *The wicked are turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*, Ps. ix. 17.

In the New Testament, religion is usually expressed by faith in God and Christ, and the love of them. Hence it is, that true Christians are called believers, and ungodly men unbelievers; and that good men are described to be such as love God; *All things shall work together for good to them that* love God, and such *as love the Lord Jesus Christ*, Rom. viii. 28. Eph. i. 24.

w the reason why these are put for the of religion is, because the belief, know- love, and fear of God, are such power- nciples, and have so great an influence nen to make them religious, that where ıe of these really is, all the rest, together ıe true and genuine effects of them, are ed to be.

sum of religion is likewise often ex- l by some eminent part of it; which plain the second phrase in the text, de- ʒ from evil. The worship of God is an ıt part of Religion; and Prayer, which ı in Scripture expressed by seeking God, ılling upon his name, is a chief part of us worship. Hence religion is described king God; *He is a rewarder of them that tly seek him*, Heb. xi. 6. And by call- on his name; *Whosoever calleth upon the of the Lord shall be saved*, Acts ii. 26. ɔ by coming to God, and departing from *He that cometh to God must believe that he* ɔ. xi. 6; that is, no man can be religious he believes there is a God: and in , it is said, *He that departeth from evil ı himself a prey*, Isa. lix. 15. Such was d state of those times of which the pro- ıere complains, that nobody could be re- , but *he was in danger* of being prose-

et me consider the fitness of the two *ı my text to* describe religion;

1. As to that of *the fear of the Lord.* The fitness of this phrase will appear, if we consider how great an influence the fear of God has upon men to make them religious. Fear is a passion that is deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which God hath implanted in all of us. Every one desires his own preservation and happiness, and therefore has a natural dread of every thing that can destroy his being, or endanger his happiness; and the greatest danger is from the greatest power. So that the fear of God is an inward acknowledgment of a holy, just, all powerful Being; God having hid in every man's conscience a secret awe of his infinite power and eternal justice. Now fear being so intimate to our natures, it is the strongest bond of laws, and the great security of our duty.

Shame and fear are the two restraints which God hath put upon human nature. Shame is the weaker, and hath place only in those in whom there are some remains of virtue: fear is the stronger, and works upon all who love themselves, and desire their own preservation; therefore, in this degenerate state of mankind, fear is that passion which has the greatest power over us, and by which God and his laws take the surest hold of us. Our desire, love, and hope, are not so apt to be wrought upon by the representation of virtue, and the promises of reward and happiness, as our fear

from the apprehension of divine displeasure: for, though we have lost in a great measure the relish of true happiness, yet we still retain a quick sense of pain and misery. So that fear relies upon a natural love of ourselves, and is complicated with a necessary desire of our own preservation; and therefore religion usually makes its first entrance into us by this passion; hence perhaps it is that Solomon, more than once, calls *the fear of the Lord, the beginning of wisdom.*

2. As for the second phrase, *departing from evil;* the fitness of it to express the whole duty of man will appear, if we consider the connexion there is between forbearing to do those things that are forbidden, and doing those things that are commanded. He that is careful to avoid all sin, will sincerely endeavour to perform all righteousness; for the soul is an active principle, and will be employed one way or other: if a man abstain from evil, he will do good. Now these being so closely connected, the whole of our duty may be expressed by either of them, but most fitly by *departing from evil,* because that is the first part of it. Religion begins in the forsaking of sin; and therefore the Scripture every where puts departing from evil first; *Depart from* evil, and *do good: Cease to do evil; learn* to do well, *Ps. xxxiv. 14. Let the wicked forsake* his way, *and the unrighteous man his thoughts,* and le

him return unto the Lord, Isa. i. 16, and liv. 7. We are first *to put off the old man which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts;* and then *to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new man,* Eph. iv. 22, 23, 24. *Eschew evil, and do good,* 1 Pet. iii. 11. To all which I may add this farther consideration, that the law of God contained in the ten commandments, consisting mostly of prohibitions, (thou shalt not do such or such a thing,) our observation of it is most fitly expressed by *departing from evil,* which yet includes obedience likewise to the positive precepts implied in those prohibitions.

Having thus explained the words of my Text, I come now to consider the propositions contained in them:

First, That religion is the best knowledge.

Secondly, That it is the truest wisdom.

I. It is the best knowledge. The knowledge of religion commends itself to us upon these two accounts:

1. Because it is the knowledge of things which are in themselves most excellent and most desirable to be known; and those are God and our duty. God is the sum of all perfection. It is delightful to know the creatures, because there are particular excellencies *dispersed among* them, which are some shadows of the divine perfections; but in God all perfections, in their highest degree, are

united. How much more delightful then must it be to fix our minds upon such an object, in which there is nothing but beauty and brightness; nothing but what is amiable, and what is excellent; what will ravish our affections, and raise our wonder; please and astonish us at once! And that our finite understandings are not able to conceive the infinite perfections of God, this indeed shows the excellency of the object, but does not altogether take away the delightfulness of the knowledge. For as it is pleasant to the eye to have an endless prospect, so is it to the understanding to view unlimited excellencies, though it cannot comprehend them.

And as the knowledge of God, in his nature and perfections, is excellent and desirable; so likewise is it to know him in those glorious manifestations of himself, in the works of creation and providence; and, above all, in that stupendous work of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ.

And as the knowledge of God is excellent, that of our duty is so likewise, which is nothing but virtue, goodness, and holiness; a conformity to the nature and will of God; and an imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections, so far as we are capable: for, to know our duty is to know what it is to be like God in *goodness, pity,* patience, clemency; in *pardoning injuries,* and passing by provocations

in justice and righteousness; in truth and faithfulness; and in a hatred and detestation of the contrary of these. In a word, it is to know what is the acceptable will of God, what it is that he delights in, and would have us do in order to our perfection and our happiness. The knowledge of the laws of the land, the customs of the country we live in, and the will of the prince we live under, is deservedly accounted excellent, how much more so is it to know the statutes of heaven, and the laws of eternity; those immutable and eternal rules of justice and righteousness;—to know the will and pleasure of the Great Monarch of the universe, and the customs of that country where we must live for ever! This made David to admire the law of God in that extraordinary manner, and to advance the knowledge of it above all other knowledge; *I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad,* Ps. cxix. 96.

2. Religion is the knowledge of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know. The goodness of every thing is measured by its end and use; that is the best thing which serves the best purpose; and the more necessary it is to such an end, the better it is: So that the best knowledge is that which is of greatest use and necessity to us in order to our *great end,* which is eternal salvation. Curious *speculations,* and the contemplation of the

do not concern us, nor serve to promote
happiness, are but a more specious and in-
ous sort of idleness, a more pardonable and
itable kind of ignorance. He that does
know those things which are of use and
ssity for him to know, is but an ignorant
, whatever he may know besides. Now
knowledge of God and Christ, and of our
, is of the greatest usefulness and necessity
in order to our being happy; *This is life*
al, (that is the only way to it,) *to know*
the only true God, and him whom thou hast
Jesus Christ, John xvii. 3. It is necessary
, in order to our happiness, to know our
; because it is necessary for us to do it,
it is impossible for us to do it, unless we
w it.

that whatever other knowledge he may
ndued with, he is but an ignorant man who
not know God, the author of his being,
preserver and protector of his life, his
reign and his judge;—the giver of every
d gift, his surest refuge in trouble, his best
d or worst enemy;—the present support of
ife, his hopes in death, his future happiness,
his portion for ever:—He is but an igno-
man who does not know his relation to
; the duty that he owes him; and the way
lease him by whom he can be made happy
iserable for ever;—who does not know
ord Jesus Christ, who is *the way*, the truth,
e life.

If a man by a vast and imperious mind, a
a heart large as the sand upon the sea-shore, (
it is said of Solomon,) could command all t
knowledge of nature and art, of words a
things;—could attain to a mastery in all la
guages, and sound the depths of all arts a
sciences;—measure the earth and the heave
tell the stars, and declare their orders and m
tions;—could discourse of the interests of
states, the intrigues of all courts, the reason
all civil laws and constitutions, and give an a
count of the history of all ages;—could spe
of trees, *from the cedar-tree that is in Lebano
even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wal
and of beasts also, and of fowls, and of creepi
things, and of fishes;*—and yet should be de
titute of the knowledge of God and Chri
and of his duty; all this would be but an ir
pertinent vanity, and a more glittering kir
of ignorance; and such a man, with all h
knowledge, would be undone for ever.

II. To be religious is the truest wisdom; a
that likewise upon two accounts:

1. It is to be wise for ourselves. There's
expression, Job xxii. 21, *he that is wise is pr
fitable to himself;* and it is said, Prov. ix. 1
if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thysel
intimating, that wisdom regards a man's ow
interest and advantage, and that he is not
wise man who does not take care of hims
nd his own concerns. As self-preservatio
e first principle of nature; so care of

selves and our own interest is the first part of wisdom. He who is wise in the affairs and concerns of other men, but careless and negligent of his own, may be said to be busy, but he is not wise; he is employed indeed, but not so as a wise man should be. Now this is the wisdom of religion, that it directs us to the care of our own proper interests and concerns.

2. To be religious is to be wise as to our main interest. Our chief end, and highest interest, is happiness; and this is happiness, to be free from all evils (if it may be,) or however, from the greatest. And to enjoy (if it may be) all good, or however, the chief. To be happy, is not only to be free from the pains and diseases of the body, but from anxiety and vexation of spirit; not only to enjoy the pleasures of sense, but peace of conscience, and quiet of mind. To be happy is not only to be so for a little while, but as long as may be, and, if it be possible, for ever.

Now religion designs our greatest and longest happiness; its aim is to free us from the greatest evils, and to bring us to the enjoyment of the greatest good. For it wisely considers, that men have immortal spirits, which, as they are spirits, are capable of a pleasure distinct from that of our bodies, and our senses; and, because they are immortal, are capable of an everlasting happiness. Now our souls being the *best part of* ourselves, and eternity being

infinitely the most considerable duration, the greatest wisdom is to secure the interest of our souls, and of eternity, though it be with loss, and to the prejudice, of our temporal interests: therefore religion directs us rather to secure inward peace, than outward ease;—to be more careful to avoid everlasting and intolerable torment, than short and light afflictions, which are but for a moment;—to court the favour of God more than the friendship of the world; and not so much to *fear them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do;* as *him, who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell.*—In a word, our main interest is to be as happy as we can, and as long as is possible; and if we be cast into such circumstances that we must be either in part and for a time, or else wholly and always miserable; the true wisdom is, to choose the greatest and most lasting happiness; but the least and shortest misery. Upon this account, religion prefers those pleasures which flow from the presence of God for evermore, infinitely before the transitory pleasures of this world; and is much more careful to avoid eternal misery, than present sufferings. This is the wisdom of religion, that, upon consideration of *the whole, it* advises and leads us to our true *interest.*

What I have been endeavouring to persuad*men to, is no other* than what God particular

recommends to us as proper for human consideration; *unto Man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* Whoever pretends to reason is obliged to acknowledge God, and to demean himself religiously towards him. For he is to our understanding, as the light of the sun is to our eyes, the first, the plainest, and the most glorious object of it. He fills heaven and earth, and every thing in them represents him to us. *The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they who know not God are without excuse,* Rom. i. 20. Alike without excuse they may justly be pronounced, who, though they do believe there is such a being as God, yet do not consider the proper consequences of such a principle; do not demean themselves towards him as becomes their relation to him, their dependance upon him, and the duty which they naturally owe him.

And yet he who considers the lives and actions of the greatest part of men would verily think that they understood nothing of all this. Therefore the Scripture represents wicked men as without understanding; *It is a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them, Deut. xxxii. 28,* and elsewhere, have all *the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* Ps. xiv. 4.

Not that they are destitute of the natural faculty of understanding, but they do not use it as they ought; they are not blind, but they wink; they *hold the truth of God in unrighteousness*, and though *they know God*, yet *they do not glorify him as God*, Rom. i. 18, 21, nor suffer the apprehensions of him to have a due influence upon their hearts and lives.

Men generally stand very much upon the credit of their understandings, and of all things hate to be accounted fools. The best way to avoid this reproach is to be truly religious, *to fear the Lord, and to depart from evil.* For certainly there is no such imprudent person as he who neglects God and his soul, and is careless about his everlasting concerns; because this man flies from happiness, pursues misery, and makes haste to be undone. Hence it is that Solomon, frequently in the Proverbs, gives the title of fool to a wicked man, as the fittest character of him, because he is so eminently such. There is no such fool as the sinner, who every moment ventures his soul, and lays his everlasting interest at stake. Every time a man provokes God, he does the greatest mischief to himself that can be imagined. A mad man, who cuts himself, tears his own flesh, and dashes his head against the stones, does not act *so unreasonably* as he, because he is not so sen*sible of what he does*: wickedness is a kind o *voluntary frenzy*, a chosen distraction; ar

every sinner does wilder and more extravagant things than any one can do who is out of his wits; only with this sad difference, that he knows better what he does. For to them who believe another life after this, an eternal state of happiness and misery, nothing can be made more evident than the folly of wicked men; for it is not a plainer truth, that the whole is greater than a part; than it is, that the concerns of eternity should be regarded more than those of time.

I will therefore put the matter into a temporal case, that wicked men, who understand any thing of the rules and principles of worldly wisdom, may see the imprudence of an irreligious and sinful course, and be convinced *that this their way is their folly, even themselves being judges.*

Is that man wise, as to his body and his health, who only clothing his hands, leaves the rest of his body naked; who provides only against the tooth-ach, and neglects whole troops of mortal diseases that are ready to rush upon him? Just so does he who takes care only for this vile body, but neglects his precious and immortal soul; who is very solicitous to prevent small and temporal inconveniences, but takes no care to *escape the damnation of hell.*

Is *he a prudent man,* as to his temporal estate, *who lays designs* for a day, without any prospect *to, or provision* for, the remaining part o

his life? Even so does he who provides for the short time of this life, but takes no care for all eternity; which is to be wise for a moment, but a fool for ever; and to act as crossly to the reason of things as can be imagined; to regard time as if it were eternity, and to neglect eternity as if it were but a short time.

Do we count him a wise man, who is wise in any thing but his own proper profession; wise for every body but himself; who is ingenious to contrive his own misery, and to do himself a mischief; but is dull and stupid as to the designing any real benefit and advantage to himself? Such a one is he who is ingenious in his calling, but a bad Christian; for Christianity is more our profession than the very trades we live upon; and such is every sinner who *is wise to do evil, but to do good hath no understanding.*

Is it wisdom in any to disoblige him who is his best friend, and can be his sorest enemy? Or with one weak troop to go out to meet him that comes against him with thousands? To fly a small danger, and run upon a greater? Thus does every wicked man who neglects the Being that can save or destroy him; who strives with his Maker; and with the small and inconsiderable forces of a man, takes the field *against the mighty* God, the Lord of hosts.

Is not he an imprudent man, who in matters *of great moment* loses opportunities never to

be retrieved? Who standing upon the sho
and seeing the tide making towards him, a
knowing that he has but a few minutes to s
himself, yet will lay himself to sleep there,
the sea rush in upon him and overwhelm hi
And is he any better who trifles away this c
of God's grace and patience, and foolis
puts off the necessary work of repentan
and the weighty business of religion to a dy
hour?

To end these questions: is he wise who ho
to attain the end without the means; nay,
means that are quite contrary to it? Such
every wicked man who hopes to be bles
hereafter without being holy here; and to
happy, that is, to find a pleasure in the enj
ment of God, and in the company of h
spirits, by rendering himself as unsuitable
and unlike them as he can.

Wouldst thou then be truely wise! be w
for thyself! wise for thy soul! wise for et
nity!—Resolve upon a religious course of li
fear God, and depart from evil. Look bey
things sensible, unto things which are not se
and are eternal. Labour to secure the great
terests of another world, and refer all the
tions of this short and dying life, to that st
which will shortly begin, but never have
end. This will approve itself to be wisdom
last, whatever the world judge of it

For not that which is approved of men now, but what will finally be approved of God, is true wisdom; that which is esteemed so by Him who is the fountain and original of all wisdom; the first rule and measure, the best and most competent judge of it.

But why should I use arguments to persuade men to that which is so excellent, so useful, and so necessary? Religion has attractions in itself beyond all arguments; for if it be the best knowledge, and the greatest wisdom, I can offer nothing beyond this to your understandings to raise your esteem of it; nothing beyond this to your affections to excite your love and desire. All that can be done, is, to set the thing before men, and to offer it to their choice; and if their natural desire of knowledge, and wisdom, and happiness, will not persuade them to be religious, it is in vain to use arguments.—Religion is matter of our freest choice, and if men will obstinately and wilfully set themselves against it, there is no remedy. God has provided no remedy for the obstinacy of men; but if they choose to be fools and to be miserable, he leaves them to inherit their choice, and to enjoy the portion of sinners.

SERMON II.

DVANTAGES OF RELIGION TO MANKIND.

PSALM xix. ver. 11.

keeping of them there is great reward.

rk at this time shall be to show, that re-
ınd obedience to the laws of God con-
ı the happiness of mankind both in re-
f this world and the other.

, I shall endeavour to show how religion
eth to the happiness of this life; and
th in respect of the inward and outward

s to the inward man. It tends to the
ement of our understandings. It raises
arges our minds, and makes them more
: of true knowledge; and in this sense I
and the following texts;—*The fear of
d is the beginning of wisdom; a good un-
ding have all they that keep his command-*
Ps. cxi. 10.—*I have more understanding
l my teachers, for thy testimonies are my
ion. I understand more than the ancients,
I keep thy precepts,* Ps. cxix. 99.

gion improves our understandings by
ng our lusts, and moderating our pas-
Intemperance, sensuality, and fleshly
lly and debase our minds even by a na-
luence; they sink us down into sense,

they indispose and unfit us for those considerations to which above all others we ought to employ ourselves. So likewise the exorbitant passions of wrath, malice, envy, and revenge, darken and distort our understandings, tincture our minds with false colours, and fill them with undue apprehensions of things.

He who is intemperate, lustful, or passionate, besides the guilt he contracts, which is continually disquieting his mind; besides the inconveniencies he brings upon himself as to his health, interrupts the free exercise of his reason. What clearness is to the eye, purity is to our minds and understandings; and as the clearness of the bodily eye disposes it for a quicker sight of material objects, so the purity of our minds, that is, freedom from lust and passion, disposes us for the most perfect acts of reason and understanding: the more we cleanse our souls from sensual lusts, so much the more active they will be in their operations; and the more we conquer our passions, so much the clearer and more unprejudiced will be our apprehension of things, and our judgments so much the firmer and steadier. And this is the meaning of that saying of Solomon; *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.* In short, freedom from irregular passions not only signifies that a man is wise, but really contributes to make him wise.

Religion tends also to the peace and pleasure of our minds, wherein happiness chiefly consists, and which all the wisdom and philosophy of the world always aimed at as the utmost felicity of this life. That this is the natural fruit of a religious and virtuous practice, the Scripture declares to us in these texts; *Great peace have all they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them*, Ps. cxix. 165.—*The fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*, Isa. xxxii. 17. When a man is once engaged in a religious course, and is accustomed to piety and holiness, all exercises of religion and devotion, all acts of goodness and virtue, are delightful to him. To honour and worship God, to pray to him and praise him, to study his will, to meditate upon him, and to love him, bring great pleasure and peace along with them. What greater satisfaction, indeed, can there be to the mind, when it is once refined from sensual pleasures, than to contemplate and admire the infinite perfections of God, to adore his greatness, and to love his goodness? How can the thoughts of the Almighty be troublesome to him who lives soberly, righteously, and godly in the world? He who loves goodness and righteousness has no reason to be afraid of God, or to be disquieted with the thoughts of him, for all the apprehensions which we naturally have of him, speak comfort, and promise

Now religion contributes to the quiet of ou minds these two ways. First, By allaying thos passions which are apt to discompose them Malice, hatred, wrath, and revenge make u uneasy; but he who can moderate these affec tions, will find peace and pleasure in his mind Secondly, By freeing us from the anxieties o guilt, and the fears of divine wrath. What a spring of peace and joy must it be to appre hend upon good grounds that God is recon ciled to us; that all our sins are perfectly for given, and shall never more be rememberec against us! What inexpressible comfort over flows the pious and devout soul from the re membrance of a holy and well spent life, anc a consciousness of its own innocency! And no

and of those accursed spirits the devils, is this, that they are of a disposition contrary to God; they are envious, malicious, and cruel, and of such a temper as is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself.

II. Religion likewise tends to the happiness of the outward man. Now the blessings of this kind are such as regard either our health, estate, reputation, or relations; and in respect of all these religion is highly advantageous.

1. A religious and virtuous life eminently conduces to health, and to long life as a consequent of it. And in this sense I understand the following texts: *My son, forget not my law, but let thy heart keep my commandments; for length of days, and long life, shall they add to thee,* Prov. iii. 1, 2. And again, *Fear the Lord and depart from evil, it shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones,* ver. 7, 8. These promises of the blessings of health and long life to good men are not only declaratory of the good intention of God towards them, but likewise of the natural tendency of the thing. For religion obliges us to the practice of those virtues which in their own nature conduce to preserve our health, and lengthen our days; such as temperance, chastity, and moderation of our passions; and the contrary vices apparently tend to impair our health, and to shorten our days. How many have wasted and consumed their bodies by lust, and brough

vous pains and mortal diseases upon them-
es! See how the wise man describes the
consequences of this sin; *He goes as an ox
he slaughter, till a dart strike through his
·; as a bird hasteneth to the snare, and know-
not that it is for his life,* Prov. vii. 22, 23.
l again, *Let not thine heart decline to her
s, go not astray in her paths; for she has cast
n many wounded, yea many strong men have
slain by her; her house is the way to hell,*
t is, to the grave), *going down to the chambers
eath,* ver. 25. How many have been ruined
ntemperance and excess, and most unnatu-
r have perverted those blessings which God
n given for the support of nature, to the de-
ction of it? How often has men's malice,
y, and discontent against others, terminated
re greatest hurt to themselves? How many,
stirring up their rage against others, have
ed it to their own destruction?

. Religion is likewise a mighty advantage
men with respect to their estates: not only
egard of God's more especial providence,
peculiar blessing, which usually attends
d men in their undertakings, and crowns
n with success; but also from the nature of
thing. And this, I doubt not, is the mean-
of the wise man concerning the temporal
efits of wisdom or religion: *In her left hand
ches and honour,* Prov. iii. 16.—They that
re *shall inherit substance,* and I will fill

their treasures, Prov. viii. 21. And religion is of such advantage, principally, by charging men with truth, fidelity, and justice in their dealings; which is a sure way of thriving, and will hold out when all fraudulent arts and devices will fail. Thus Solomon observes to us; *he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his way shall be known*, Prov. x. 9: his indirect dealing will one time or other be discovered, and then he loses his reputation, and his interest sinks. Falsehood and deceit only serve a present turn, and the consequence of them is pernicious; but truth and fidelity are a lasting advantage: *The righteous hath an everlasting foundation*, Prov. x. 25.—*The lip of truth is established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment*, Prov. xii. 19. Religion likewise engages men to diligence in their callings, and how much this conduces to advance their fortunes, as daily experience teaches, so the wise man hath told us; *The diligent hand maketh rich*, Prov. x. 4; and again, *Seest thou a man diligent in business, he shall stand before princes, he shall not stand before mean persons*, Prov. xxii. 29.

And where men, by reason of the difficult circumstances of their condition, cannot arrive to any eminency of estate, yet religion makes a compensation for this, by teaching them to be content with that moderate and competent fortune which God hath given them. For the

shortest way to be rich is not by enlarging our estates, but by contracting our desires. What a wise heathen* says of philosophy is much more true of religion, 'It makes all those rich to whom it makes riches superfluous;' and they are so to those who are taught by religion to be content with such a portion of them as God's providence hath thought fit to allot them.

3. Nothing gives a man more firm and established reputation, than a prudent and substantial piety. When this discovers itself in a constant and serious devotion, accompanied with the fruits of goodness, kindness, and righteousness, (without ostentation, austerity, or indiscreet zeal), it not only makes us valued by the sober and virtuous, but even by the vicious and degenerate. Upon this account it is that the apostle advises Christians, if they would recommend themselves to the esteem of God and men, earnestly to mind the weighty and substantial parts of religion: *Let not your good be evil spoken of; for the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

4. *Religion* also conduces to the happiness of our relations, as it derives a blessing upon all that belong to us; the goodness of God

* Seneca.

being so diffusive as to scatter his blessings round about the habitations of the just.

But setting aside the consideration of God's providence, religion in its own nature tends to the welfare of those that are related to us, because it lays the strictest obligations upon men to take care of their families and relations, and to make the best provision both for their comfortable subsistence in this world, and their salvation in the next. And those who neglect these duties, the Scripture is so far from esteeming Christians, that it accounts them worse than heathens: *He that provideth not for his own, especially those of his own house, is worse than an infidel, and hath denied the* FAITH, 1 Tim. v. 8.

Besides, it is many times seen that the posterity of holy and good men, especially of such as have evidenced their piety by their charity, have met with unusual kindness from others; and have by a sacred disposition of divine providence been unexpectedly provided for; and that, as they have all the reason in the world to believe, on account of the piety and charity of their parents. This David tells us from his own particular observation: *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*, *Ps. xxxvii. 25.* And that by the righteous is here meant the good and merciful man, appears from the description of him in the nex

ds, *He is ever merciful and lendeth, and his* ' *is blessed.*

)n the contrary, the posterity of the wicked ıy times inherit the fruits of their fathers' :s; and that not only by a just judgment of l, but from the natural consequence of ıgs. In this sense that expression in Job is :n verified, that *God lays up the iniquity of ked men for their children*, Job xxi. 19. Ex- ience testifies that the intemperate and un- many times transmit their bodily infirmities diseases to their children, and entail a se- : curse upon their substance, which either nsibly wastes and consumes it, or eats out heart and comfort of it. Thus you see ı religion in all respects conduces to the piness of this life.

econdly, Religion and virtue do likewise ıt certainly and directly tend to the eternal piness and salvation of men's souls. And is incomparably the greatest benefit that ɔunds to us by being religious, in compa- n of which all temporal considerations are than nothing and vanity. The worldly antages that religion brings to men, are a ıible recommendation of it even to the low- and meanest spirits; but to those who are ed above sense, and aspire after immor- y, *who* believe the perpetual duration of *souls, and the* resurrection of their bodies; se *who are* thoroughly convinced of the

inconsiderableness of this short dying life, and of all the concerns of it, in comparison of that eternal state which remains for us in another world; to these, I say, the consideration of a future happiness, and of those unspeakable and everlasting rewards which shall then be given to holiness and virtue, is certainly the most powerful motive, and the most likely to prevail upon them: for they who are persuaded of their own immortality can never be satisfied with any thing less than the hopes of an endless felicity. And these hopes the Christian religion only can render firm and unshaken. But because I more particularly designed from this text to speak of the temporal advantages which redound to men from religion, therefore I shall content myself to show very briefly how a religious life conduces to our future happiness; and that upon two accounts:

1. From the promise of God. *Godliness*, says the apostle, *hath the promise of the life that is to come*, 1 Tim. iv. 8. God has all along in the Scripture suspended the promise of eternal life upon this condition. He has positively declared, that without obedience and holiness of life no man shall see the Lord. And this might be argument enough, if there was no other, to convince us of the necessity of obeying the laws of God in order to our happiness. Eternal life is his gift; he may bestow it upon what condition he pleases; and

surely, what he has made the condition of obtaining it, cannot justly be thought an hard one. If religion brought no advantage in this world, yet the happiness of heaven is so great, as will abundantly recompence all our pains and endeavours. There is encouragement enough in the reward to engage us in the work. Had God thought fit to have imposed the most grievous and difficult things upon us, ought we not to have submitted to them; and to have undertaken them with cheerfulness, upon such great and glorious promises? As NAAMAN's servants said to him in another case, *Had he bid thee to do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it?* 2 Kings v. 13. So if God had said, that without poverty and actual martyrdom no man shall see the Lord, would not any man that believes heaven and hell, and understands what it is to escape extreme and eternal misery, and to enjoy unspeakable and endless glory, have been willing to accept these conditions? *How much more when he hath only said, wash and be clean;* and, *let every man that hath this hope in him purify himself as he is pure?*

2. From the very nature and reason of the thing, a religious and holy life conduces to our future happiness, as it disposes and prepares *us for it.* We cannot be otherwise happy, but *by our conformity* to God; without this we *cannot possibly* love him, nor find any ple-

n, restrains us from the inordinate love
nsual delights of this world; calls off
ds from these inferior things, and seeks
them to higher and spiritual objects:
ld we set our hearts only upon these
nd be able to taste no pleasure but
sensual and earthly, we must be ex-
miserable when we come into that
where we shall meet with no employ-
itable to our disposition, no pleasure
ll agree with our depraved appetites
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gion tends directly to the happiness of
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m an irreligious and vicious course of
et the sinner declare what he has found
rience. Hath lewdness and intemper-
en more for his health than if he had
astly and soberly? Hath falsehood and
: proved at the long-run more for the
ment and security of his estate, than
d honesty would have done? Hath
: *that he* has lived in made him more
nds, and gained him a better reputa-

tion in the world, than the practice of holiness and virtue would have done? Has he found that peace and satisfaction of mind in an evil course, and that quiet enjoyment of himself, and comfortable assurance of God's favour, and good hope of his future condition, which a religious and virtuous life would have given him? Nay, on the contrary, have not some of his vices weakened his body and broken his health? Have not others wasted his estate, and reduced him to want? What notorious vice is there that does not blemish a man's reputation, and make him either hated or despised; and that not only by the wise and virtuous, but even by the generality of men? Was ever any wicked man free from the stings of a guilty conscience, and the torment of a restless and uneasy mind;—from the secret dread of divine displeasure, and of the vengeance of another world? Let the sinner freely speak the inward sense of his soul in this matter; and I doubt not but that he will acknowledge all this to be true, and is able to confirm it from his own sad experience.

What then can excuse in any a disregard to religion, when it is so apparently for the benefit of mankind? When there is no real interest in this world but may be as effectually promoted, and pursued to as great advantage, nay, usually to far greater, by a man that lives soberly, and righteously, and godly in the *world, than* by him who leads the contrary

course? Let none say, with those profane persons whom the prophet speaks of, *It is in vain to serve the Lord, and what profit is it that we have kept his commandments,* Mal. iii. 14. God has not been so hard a master to us that we have reason thus to complain of him. He has given us no laws but what are for our good; nay, so gracious has he been to us, as to link together our duty and our interest, and to make those very things the instances of our obedience, which are the natural means and causes of our happiness. Satan was so far in the right when he charged Job that he did not serve God for nought. It is he himself that is the hard master who rewards his slaves with nothing but shame, sorrow, and misery. But God requires no man's service upon hard and unreasonable terms. The greatest part of our work is a present reward to itself, and for whatever else we do or suffer for him he offers us abundant consideration. And if men did but wisely love themselves, they would upon this very ground, if there were no other, be truly religious. No man can serve his own interest better, than by serving God. Religion conduces both to our present and future happiness, and when the gospel enjoins piety towards God, justice and charity towards men, and temperance and chastity in reference to ourselves; the true interpretation of these laws is this, *God requires,* in order to our eternal

happiness, that we should do those things which tend most to our temporal welfare; that is, in plainer words, he promises to make us happy for ever, upon condition that we will but do that which is best for ourselves in this world. To conclude, religion is founded in the interest of men, rightly apprehended. So that, if the god of this world and the lusts of men did not blind their eyes, so as to render them unfit to discern their true interest, it would be impossible, so long as they love themselves and desire their own happiness, to keep them from being religious; for they could not but conclude *that* to be their interest, and being so convinced, they would resolve to pursue it.

SERMON III.

OF THE EXCELLENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

PHILL. iii. 8.

Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord.

My design, from this text, is to represent the *excellency of* the Christian Religion above that *of any other* religion in the world;

First, As it more clearly reveals to us the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all religion.

Secondly, As it gives us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives.

Thirdly, As it proposes more powerful arguments to persuade us to obey this law. And,

Fourthly, As it furnishes better motives to patience and content under the evils and afflictions of this life.

Now these are the greatest advantages that any religion can have—to give men right apprehensions of God—a perfect rule of good life—prevailing arguments to persuade them to embrace such a life—and patience to bear the afflictions they may meet with in the course of it.

I. The Christian Religion more clearly reveals to us the nature of God than any other religion ever did. It gives him a more perfect, and a more lovely character: a more perfect, in representing him to us as a pure spirit, and that he is to be worshipped in such a manner as is most suitable to his spiritual nature; *God is a spirit*, says our Saviour, *and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth:* a more lovely, in that there are no where so plain and full declarations of his mercy and love to the sons of men as are made in the gospel. The heathens did generally dread God, and *look upon him* as fierce, cruel, and

revengeful; and therefore endeavoured to appease him by the horrid and barbarous sacrifices of men, and of their own children: in the Old Testament he is usually styled *the Lord of Hosts, the great and the terrible God:* but in the New Testament he is represented to us as *the Father of mercies, the God of all consolations, the God of all patience, the God of love and peace*; nay, he is said to be *love itself*, and to *dwell in love.*

II. The Christian Religion has given us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives. It has made our duty more plain and certain in many instances than either the philosophy of the heathen, or the precepts of Moses had done. It commands universal love, and kindness, and good-will among men, a readiness to forgive our greatest enemies, to do good to them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, and to pray for them that despitefully use and persecute us; and it presses all this more vehemently, and forbids malice, revenge, and contention more strictly, than any other religon ever did before.

And as Christianity has given us a more certain, so likewise a more perfect law for the government of our lives. All the duties it requires of us are such as suit the reason of mankind; such as have their foundation in the nature of God, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies; such as tend to perfect hu-

man nature, and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of goodness and virtue. The laws of our religion tend to the universal happiness of mankind; they command nothing but what is reasonable and useful; they omit nothing that may contribute to the glory of God, or the welfare of men; nor do they restrain us in any thing but what is contrary either to the regular inclinations of nature, or to our reason and true interest; and they forbid nothing but what is base and unworthy, a reproach to our understandings, and what tends either to our own private harm, or to public disorder and confusion.

And that this is the tenor of the laws of the gospel will appear from our Saviour's sermons and discourses; particularly that upon the mount; wherein he charges his disciples and followers to be humble, meek, righteous, merciful, pure, peaceable, patient under sufferings and persecutions, good and kind to all, even to those that are evil and injurious to us, and to endeavour to excel, in all goodness and virtue. This will likewise appear from the writings of the holy Apostles. St. Paul represents the design of the Christian doctrine in a very few words, but of admirable sense and weight, *The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men*, teaching us, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously*, and godly in

this present world, Titus ii. 11, 12. The same apostle makes this the main condition of the covenant of the gospel on our part, *Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity,* 2 Tim. ii. 19. St. James describes the Christian doctrine (which he calls the wisdom that is from above) by these characters, *It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,* James iii. 17. St. Peter calls the gospel, *the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby,* saith he, *are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,* 2 Peter i. 3, 4; and upon this consideration he exhorts those to whom he writes to give all diligence, to add to their faith the several virtues of a good life, without which, he tells them *they are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* I will conclude with that full and comprehensive passage of St. Paul to the Philippians, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things,* Phil. iv. 8.

But the perfection of the laws of Christianity

will most evidently appear by taking a brief survey of them. And they may be all referred to these two general heads; 1. Such as tend to make men singly and personally good; and 2. Such as tend to the peace and happiness of society.

And, First, for those which tend to make men singly and personally good. The precepts of this kind may likewise be divided into two sorts; 1. Such as enjoin piety towards God; and, 2. Such as require the good government of ourselves, with respect to the enjoyments and pleasures of this life.

1. As to the precepts of Christianity enjoining piety towards God. The sum of natural religion, as it refers more immediately to God, is this, that we should inwardly reverence and love him, and that we should express that reverence and love by outward worship; that we should testify our dependence upon him, and our confidence of his goodness, by constant prayers and supplications to him for mercy and help for ourselves and others; that we should acknowledge our obligations to him for the many favours and benefits which every day and every minute we receive from him, by continual praises and thanksgivings. And that, on the contrary, we should not entertain any unworthy thoughts of God, nor give to any other that honour and reverence which is due to him; that we should not worship him in any

manner that is either unsuitable to the perfection of his nature, or contrary to his revealed will; that we should carefully avoid the profane and irreverent use of his holy name, by cursing, or customary swearing; and beware of the contempt or neglect of his worship. This is the sum of the first part of natural religion, and all the duties of Christianity which respect God, are no other than what every man's natural reason thus prompts him to perform, the two sacraments excepted, (which are of great use and significancy in the church) and praying to the Father in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ.

2. To consider the precepts of our religion, which require the good government of ourselves in respect to the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. Christianity commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste, all manner of sobriety, temperance and moderation, in reference to our appetites and passions; requiring that *we should not walk after the flesh, but after the spirit,* Rom. viii. 1; that we should *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,* 2 Cor. vii. 1; that we should *be holy in all manner of conversation,* 1 Peter i. 15. And it forbids whatever is unnatural, unreasonable, and unhealthful in the use of pleasures, and of any of God's creatures. St. John distributes *the lusts* and irregular appetites of men into *three kinds, the lust of the flesh,* the lust of the

eyes, and the pride of life, 1 John ii. 16; answerable to the three sorts of tempting objects that are in the world, pleasures, riches, and honours; and Christianity strictly forbids all these: *Take heed and beware of covetousness* (says our Saviour, and he adds this excellent reason), *for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,* Luke xii. 15. And as by it pride, ambition, and vain glory, are forbidden; so are humility, modesty, and condescension, commanded: *Learn of me,* says Christ, *for I am meek and lowly in spirit,* Matt. xi. 29.—*Mind not high things, but condescend to them that are of low degree,* Rom. xii. 16.—*Let nothing be done through vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves,* Phil. ii. 3. With reference to sensual pleasures—we are enjoined *to take heed lest we be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness,* Luke xxi. 36; we are commanded *to walk decently, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness,* Romans xiii. 13; *to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,* 1 Peter ii. 11. Now all these precepts not only tend to beget in us such virtues and dispositions as are reasonable and suitable to our nature, and every way for our temporal convenience and advantage; but such also as carry us to piety and religion, by purifying our souls from sensual *delights. For* covetousness debases a man's

spirit; intemperance and lust cloud his understanding, and unfit it for the contemplation of things spiritual and divine. Thus you see how the precepts of Christianity tend to the perfection of human nature, considering men singly and personally.

Secondly, The other sort of precepts of the Christian religion, are such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society. And the reason of mankind can devise nothing more proper to this end than the laws of Christianity are; for they command all those virtues that are apt to sweeten the spirits and allay the passions and animosities of men; they require us to love our neighbour (that is, every man in the world, even our greatest enemies) as ourselves; and for this end, among others, was the sacrament of the Lord's Supper instituted, that by commemorating the love of our dying Saviour, who laid down his life for his enemies, we might be put in mind how we ought to love one another. In pursuance of this general precept we are to do good to all men, if it be possible, and as much as in us lies to live peaceably with all men—to be tender hearted and compassionate towards those that are in want or misery, and ready to supply and relieve them—*to mourn with those that mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice,—to bear one anothers burdens, and to forbear one another in love; to be easily* reconciled to them that have of-

fended us, and to be ready to forgive, from our hearts, the greatest injuries that can be done us.

The laws of Christianity do likewise secure both the private interests of men, and the public peace, by enforcing all the dictates of nature concerning justice and equity, and our doing to others as we would have them do to us; by commanding obedience to human laws, and submission to government under pain of damnation; and by forbidding violence and oppression, defrauding and over-reaching one another, perfidiousness and treachery, breach of trusts, oaths, or promises, undutifulness to superiors, sedition and rebellion against magistracy and authority. And if there be any thing else that is apt to disturb the peace of the world, and to alienate the affections of men from one another, as sowerness of disposition, rudeness of behaviour, censoriousness, and sinister interpretation of things, all cross and distasteful humours, and whatever else may render the conversation of men grievous and uneasy to one another; all these are either expressly, or by clear consequence, forbidden in the New Testament.

And now, what could any religion do more towards reforming the dispositions and manners of men? What laws can be devised more proper and effectual to advance the nature of man to its highest perfection, to procure the *ease of men's minds*, and the peace and hap-

piness of society, than these precepts of Christianity are? Several of which, as those of loving our enemies, of not revenging injuries, of rendering good for evil, though they have been esteemed reasonable by some of the wisest among the heathen, yet by reason of the degeneracy of the world, and of the obscurity and uncertainty of human reason, they never obtained the reputation and force of natural laws: so that we owe to Christianity the discovery of the most certain and perfect rule of life that ever the world was acquainted with.

III. The Christian religion proposes the most powerful arguments to persuade men to obey these laws. The gospel offers such considerations to us, as are fit to work very forcibly upon two of the most governing passions in the mind of man, our hopes and our fears: to encourage our hopes, it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in case of obedience; and to awaken our fears, it threatens sinners with the most dreadful and durable torments: *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and immortality*, it promiseth *eternal life; but unto them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness*, it threatens *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*, Romans ii. 7, 8. And this is what makes the doctrine of the gospel *so powerful* an instrument for reforming the *world, that* it proposes such glorious rewards

and such terrible punishments as no religion ever did. And to make the consideration of them more effectual, it gives us far greater assurance of the certainty of these things than ever the world had before. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead hath given the world a full assurance of another life after this, and of a future judgment; for he whom God raised from the dead, declared, *it was he who was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead*, Acts x. 42. And the firm belief of a future judgment, which shall render to every man according to his deeds, is to a reasonable nature the most forcible motive of all other to a good life. So that the laws of Christianity have the finest sanction of any laws to secure the obedience and observance of them; for what can restrain men from sin, if the terrors of the Lord, and the evident danger of eternal destruction, will not? What encouragement can be given to goodness beyond the assurance of an endless happiness?

IV. The Christian Religion furnishes us with the best motives to patience and content under the evils and afflictions of this life. It sets before us an example that lies level to all mankind, of a man like ourselves, who had a tender sense of the least suffering, and yet patiently endured the greatest; *of Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*, who for the joy *that was set before him, endured the cross*, despis-

ing the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God, Heb. xii. 2.

God thought it expedient that the first Christians should, by great hardships and persecutions, be trained up for glory; and to encourage them hereto, the *Captain of our salvation was crowned by sufferings,* Heb. ii. 10. Much more should the consideration of this pattern arm us with patience against the ordinary calamities of this life; especially if we consider his example with this advantage, that though his sufferings were not for himself, but for us, yet he bore them patiently. But the main consideration is the glory which shall follow, as the reward of our sufferings, if they be for God and his cause; and, if upon any other innocent account, as a reward of our patience; *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* 2 Cor. iv. 17. And who would not be content to suffer upon terms of such advantage; *to pass through many tribulations into the kingdom of God?* And to endure a short affliction for an endless happiness?

These are the arguments which Christianity lays before us, and they are firm and sound at the bottom; and apt to work upon human nature, as the most ordinary understanding is capable of the force of them. In the strength and virtue of this great example, and in contemplation of this glorious reward, with what

and cheerfulness did vast numbers
ıs of people in the first ages of Chris-
encounter all the rage and malice of the
, and embrace torments and death?
ıd now I have, as briefly and plainly as I
l, endeavoured to represent the excellency
ıe Christian Religion, in respect both of the
ıear discoveries which it makes of the nature of God, and of the perfection of its laws, and the power of its arguments to persuade men to obey and suffer the will of God; by which you may see what the proper tendency of this religion is, and what the laws of it would make men, if they would but live according to them —substantially religious towards God—patient under, and contented with, the dispensation of his providence towards them—chaste and temperate—just and honest—kind and peaceable and good-natured towards one another. In a word the gospel describes God, in all respects, such a one as we would wish him to be; gives us such laws as every reasonable man would choose to live by; and lays down such arguments to persuade us to obey these laws, as no man that has any tenderness for his own interest and happiness, either in this world or the other, can refuse to be moved withal.

And do we not all profess to be of this excellent religion? but alas! who will believe we are so, that looks upon the actions, and considers the lives of the greatest part of us who call ourselves *Christians!* How grossly and openly do

many of us contradict the plain precepts of the gospel, by living intemperately, unjustly, or profanely! as if the grace of God which brings salvation, had never appeared to us! as if we had never heard of heaven or hell, or believed not one word of what the Scripture says concerning them! and as if we were in no expectation *of the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, whom God hath appointed to judge the world in righteousness;* and who will bestow mighty rewards upon those who faithfully serve him, but will come *in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

Let us not then deceive ourselves by pretending to this excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, if we do not frame our lives according to it; for though we know these things never so well, yet we are not happy unless we do them; nay, we are but the more miserable for knowing them if we do them not: therefore it concerns every one of us to consider seriously what we believe, and whether our belief of the Christian Religion have its due effect upon our lives; if not, all the precepts, promises, and threatenings of the gospel will rise up in judgment against us; the articles of our faith will be so many articles of accusation; and the great weight of our charge will be this, that we did not obey that gospel which we professed to believe; that we

made confession of the Christian faith, but lived like heathens. Not to believe the Christian Religion, after so great evidence and confirmation as God has given to it, is very unreasonable; but to believe it to be true, and yet live as if it were false, is the greatest contradiction that can be. He that believes Christianity, and yet lives contrary to it, knows that he has no reason for what he does, and is convinced he ought to do otherwise; and accordingly God will deal most severely with such persons. He will pardon a thousand defects in our understandings, if they do not proceed from gross neglect, but the faults of our wills have no excuse.

Dost thou believe that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?* And dost thou still allow thyself in *ungodliness and wordly lusts?* Art thou convinced that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord?* And dost thou still persist in a wicked course? Art thou fully persuaded that no *whoremonger, nor adulterer, nor covetous, nor unrighteous person shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ?* And dost thou, for all that, continue to practise these vices? What canst thou say, man, why it should not be to thee according to thy faith? If it so fall out, that thou art miserable and undone for ever, thou hast no reason to be surprised as if some unexpected thing had hap-

pened to thee: It is but with thee just as thou believedst it would be when thou didst these things; for how couldst thou expect that God should accept of thy good belief, when thou didst so notoriously contradict it by a bad life? How couldst thou but think that God should condemn thee for doing those things, for which thine own conscience condemned thee all the while thou wast doing of them? When we come into the other world there is no consideration that will sting our consciences more cruelly than this, that we did wickedly when we knew how to have done better, and chose to make ourselves miserable, when we understood the way to have been happy.

To conclude, we Christians have certainly the best and holiest, the wisest and most reasonable religion in the world; but then we are in the worst condition of all mankind, if the best religion in the world do not make us good.

SERMON IV.

THE PRECEPTS OF CHRISTIANITY NOT GRIEVOUS.

1 JOHN v. 3.

And his commandments are not grievous.

IN discoursing upon these words, I shall endeavour,

First, To convince you how reasonable the laws of God are; that is, how suitable they are

to our nature, and how advantageous to our interest.

Secondly, To show that we have sufficient power and ability for the performance of them; and,

Thirdly, That we have the greatest encouragements to this purpose.

I. I am to set before you how reasonable the laws of God are; that is, how suitable they are to our nature, and how advantageous to our interest. By the right which God has over us, as we are his creatures, he might, without injustice, have imposed difficult tasks upon us; but in making laws for us he has not made use of that right. He has commanded us nothing in the gospel that is either unsuitable to our reason, or prejudicial to our interest; nay, nothing that is severe and against the grain of our nature, but when either the apparent necessity of our interest requires it, or an extraordinary reward is promised to our obedience: *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This is the sum of the natural law, that we should behave ourselves reverently and obediently towards the divine majesty; justly and charitably towards men; and that, in order to fit us for the better discharge of these duties, we should use sensual delights with temperance and moderation. And if we

go over the laws of Christianity, we shall find, that, excepting a very few particulars, they do but enjoin the same things, only they have made our duty more clear and certain.

As to the several parts of God's worship—prayer, thanksgiving, hearing and reading his word, receiving the sacrament, these are all no less for our own comfort, than for the honour of God and religion. And there is nothing of difficulty or trouble in the outward performance of them, but what hypocrisy can make tolerable to itself; and certainly they must not only be much more easy, but even delightful, when they are directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections.

As for those laws of religion which concern our duty to ourselves, as temperance and chastity; or to others, as the several branches of justice and charity, comprehended in those general rules of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and of doing to others as we would have them do to us; they enjoin nothing but what is most reasonable and fit to be done by us; nothing but what, if we were to consult our own interest and happiness, we would choose for ourselves; nothing but what is easy to be understood, and as easy to be practised, by an honest and a willing mind.

Now the practice of all these laws is suitable to our nature and understanding, proper to our condition in this world, and preparatory

to our happiness in the next. And no man's reason ever dictated to him the contrary; that it is fit for a creature not to love God; to be undutiful to his great Sovereign, and ungrateful to his best benefactor; that it is reasonable for a man to debauch himself by intemperance and brutish sensuality; to hate, defraud, and oppress other men: our very natural reason, if we will but listen to the dictates of it, is an enemy to all these sins, and a law against all these vices.

And as the practice of piety and virtue is agreeable to our reason, so is it likewise to our interest: some virtues plainly tend to the preservation of our health; others to the improvement and security of our estates; all to the peace and quiet of our minds, and even to the advancement of our reputation; for though the world be generally bad, and men are apt to approve nothing so much as what they do themselves; yet, I know not how it comes to pass, they are commonly so just to virtue, as to praise it in others, even when they do not practise it themselves.

As for these precepts of Christianity which seem to be most harsh and difficult, as repentance, restitution, mortifications of our lusts and passions, humility, patience and content, resignation of ourselves to the will of God, forgiving and loving our enemies, self-denial for the cause of God and religion; if we consider thoroughly the nature and tendency of them,

even these will appear both reasonable in ther
selves, and, on one account or other, really f
our advantage.

What more reasonable than repentanc
than that a man, when he hath done amis
should be heartily sorry for it, and resolve
do so no more? And, in case our offen
against God has been complicated with inju
to men, it is but reasonable we should mal
restitution, as far as we are able; for witho
this our repentance is not real, because
have not done what we can to undo our faul
nor can any man be judged to be truly sor
for his sin, when he retains the profit of it
himself.

Mortification of our lusts and passions, thoug
like repentance, it has something in it that
troublesome, yet nothing that is really to o
prejudice. If we give way to our passio
we do but gratify ourselves for the present,
order to our future disquiet; but if we res
and conquer them, we lay the foundation
perpetual peace in our minds; if we gove
ourselves in the use of sensual delights by t
laws of God and reason, we shall better co
sult our ease, than if we let loose the reins
our appetites and lusts: for the more we g
tify them, the more craving they will be, a
the more impatient of denial. Every lust i
kind of dropsy; and the more we drink,
more we shall thirst.

Humility, though it may seem to lesse

yet it is truly the readiest way to gain respect; as, on the contrary, pride takes the most improper means to accomplish the end it aims at. All other vices, in some measure, attain their end; covetousness usually raises an estate, ambitious endeavours often advance men to high places; but pride and insolence, and contempt of others, infallibly defeat their own design.

What more reasonable than patience and content; and that we should in all things resign ourselves to the will of God, who loves us as well as we do ourselves, and knows what is good for us better than we do ourselves? This certainly is the best way to prevent anxiety of mind, and to make the worst condition as tolerable as it can be, and much easier than it would be otherwise.

As for that peculiar law of Christianity which forbids revenge, and commands us to forgive injuries, and to love our enemies; no man can think it grievous, who considers the sweetness of love, and the glorious victory of overcoming evil with good; and then compares these, with the restless torments, and perpetual tumults, of a malicious and revengeful spirit.

And, lastly, Self-denial, for the cause of God and religion, is neither unreasonable nor to our disadvantage. If we consider our infinite obligations to God, we have no reason to think *much to sacrifice to* him all that is dear to us *in this world;* especially if we consider with

all how disproportionably great our reward shall be in the next. The interest of religion is, besides, of so great importance to the happiness of mankind, that we are bound to assert the truth of it with the hazard of every thing that is here most valuable.

II. We have a sufficient power and ability to perform God's commands. It is true, we have contracted a great deal of weakness by our wilful departure from goodness; but that grace which the gospel offers for our assistance is sufficient for us; and this seems to be the particular reason why the Apostle says, that God's commandments are not grievous, because he offers us an assistance proportionable to the difficulty of his commands, and the necessity of our condition; for it follows immediately after the text, *for whosoever is born of God overcometh the world;* therefore the commandments of God are not grievous, because every Christian is endued with a power whereby he is able to resist and conquer the temptations of the world: but then we are to understand that this assistance is only offered to men, and not forced upon them. If we beg God's grace, but neglect to make use of it; if we implore his assistance to mortify our lusts, but will not contribute our own endeavours, God will withdraw his grace, and take away his *Holy* Spirit from us; nay, if after we have *begun well,* we notoriously slacken our endea-

vours, we forfeit the divine assistance; if, when by God's grace we have conquered the first difficulties of religion, and gained some habitual strength against sin, we grow careless and remiss, and lay ourselves open to temptations, God's spirit will not always strive with us; for notwithstanding all the promises of the gospel, and the mighty assistances there offered to us, if we love any lust, and will with Sampson lay our head in Dalilah's lap, we shall be insensibly robbed of our strength, and become like other men.

III. We have the greatest encouragements to observe God's commands. Two things make any course of life easy; present pleasure, and the assurance of a future reward.

1. Present pleasure, flowing from the testimony of his conscience, naturally springs up in the mind of a good man; *Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.* All acts of piety and virtue are not only delightful for the present, but they leave peace and content behind them; a peace that no outward violence can interrupt or take from us. The pleasures of a holy life have moreover this peculiar advantage of worldly joys, that we shall never be weary of them, nor cloyed by the frequent repetition or long enjoyment of them.

I know that some vices pretend to bring great pleasures along with them, and that the

delights of a voluptuous life are attended with much pomp and noise, like the sports of children and fools, which are loud and clamorous; or, as Solomon elegantly compares them, like *the crackling of thorns under a pot*, which makes a little noise and a sudden blaze that is presently over; but the serious and manly pleasures, the solid and substantial joys, are only to be found in the ways of religion and virtue. The most sensual man never felt his heart touched with so exquisite and lasting a pleasure as that which springs from a clear conscience, and a mind fully satisfied with its own actions.

But, secondly, the greatest encouragement of all, is the assurance of a future reward; the firm persuasion whereof is enough to raise us above any thing in this world, and to support us against the greatest difficulties. So the Apostle reasons, *his commandments are not grievous, for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* The belief of a future happiness and glory made the first Christians so victorious over the world, and gave them courage to resist the pleasures and terrors of it. A religious course of life may indeed be encumbered with many calamities which are naturally grievous to flesh and blood; but a Christian is able to comfort himself under all these, with the thoughts of his end, which is everlast-

ing life. He considers the goodness of God, which he believes would not deny him the free enjoyment of the things of this world, were it not that he has such pleasures in store for him as will abundantly recompense his present self-denial and sufferings.

Let us now put both these together, the pleasures of religion, and the rewards of it; and they cannot but appear a mighty encouragement. With what cheerfulness does a man that lives a pious and virtuous life, reject the pleasures of sin, and the allurements of sense? And how is he confirmed in his holy resolution, when he finds that God and his own conscience applaud his conduct? When all along in the course of religion and a virtuous life, he has for his present reward the pleasures of innocence; and for his future encouragement, the joyful hopes of being happy for ever.

But are all the ways of virtue so smooth as we have represented them? Hath not our Saviour told us, *that strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it?* Matt. vii. 14. Does not the apostle say, that *through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God,* Acts xiv. 22; and that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution?* 2 Tim. iii. 12. And does not the Scripture speak of *striving, wrestling, running, fighting,* of *labouring, watching, and giving all diligence?* And is there no-

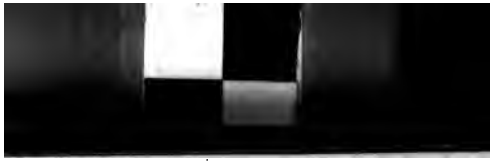
thing grievous in all this? In answer to this objection, be pleased to consider these six things.

First, That the suffering of persecution for religion is an extraordinary case, and chiefly concerned the first ages of Christianity; and therefore the general sayings of our Saviour and his Apostles concerning the persecuted state of Christians are to be limited to those first times, and by no means be equally extended to all ages of the church.

Secondly, This discourse concerning the easiness of God's commands, all along supposes the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious course, where there has been a departure from it; which, as it must have been from our own choice, its consequences are only to be charged upon ourselves. The indisposition towards obeying the commands of God was contracted or confirmed by our having neglected them; let us in earnest apply ourselves to their performance, we shall soon experience much more ease and delight in it, than we ever found in our criminal pursuits, and the gratification of our lusts.

Thirdly, When the apostle says, *the commandments of God are not grievous*, he does by no means intend to insinuate that they are so easy as to require no earnest endeavours on our part; he only aims to prevent an objection that *lurks at the* bottom of many men's hearts, as if *religion* were a most grievous and intolerable

urthen, and that there were more trouble and ess pleasure in it than in any other action of uman life: this he utterly denies, but does ot hereby mean, that such diligence and industry as are commonly used about other things re needless as to it. If I should tell you that he business of religion does not require a very igorous prosecution, and great earnestness of ndeavour, I should contradict the Holy Scriptures. And, surely, it is sufficient to recommend religion to any considerate person, that he advantages of it are greater than of any worldly design; and the difficulties of it not greater. If the same industry which men commonly use to advance themselves in the world will serve to bring them to heaven, can they have any just ground to complain of the hard terms of religion? and I think I may truly say that usually less than this does it. However, thus much I am sure of, if men would be as serious to save their immortal souls, as they are to support their dying bodies; if they would but provide for eternity with the same concern as they do for this life; if they would but seek heaven with the same zeal as they seek earthly things; if they would but love God as much as many do the world, and mind godliness as much as they usually do gain; if they would but go to church with as good a will as they do to their *fairs and markets*, and be as earnest at their *devotions as they* commonly are in driving a



bargain; if they would but endure some troubles and inconveniences in the ways of religion with the same patience and constancy as they can do storms and foul ways when they are travelling about their worldly occasions; if they would but avoid other bad company as they do that of cheats, and reject the temptations of the devil and the world as they do the fair speeches of a man whom they verily believed to have a design to overreach them; I am confident they would be much surer of heaven upon these terms, than they could be, by doing all the other things, of getting an estate, or attaining any thing in this world.

And cannot every man do thus much? All that I have said is no more than that we should use our sincere endeavours; and this surely we can all do; for to use our sincere endeavours is nothing else but to do as much as we can; and, if we do that, we are sure of God's grace and assistance; but we expect that religion should cost us no pains, that happiness should be gained without any endeavours of ours, and that after we have done what we please while we live, God should take us to heaven when we die: but though the commandments of God are not grievous, yet it is fit to let men know they are not thus easy.

Fourthly, All the difficulties of religion are *very much* allayed and sweetened by hope *and love:* by the hopes of a mighty reward;

so great as is enough to make us break through all discouragements: and by the love of God, who hath taken all imaginable ways to endear himself to us; he gave us our beings, and when we were fallen from that happiness, to which at first we were designed, he was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of it, by sending his only Son into the world to die for us; so that, if we have any sense of kindness, we cannot but love him who hath done so much to engage us; and if we sincerely love him, nothing that he commands will be grievous to us; nay, the greatest pleasure we are capable of will be to please him.

Fifthly, There is incomparably more trouble in the ways of sin, than in those of religion. Every known sin is naturally attended with some inconvenience of harm, or danger, or disgrace; which the sinner seldom considers till the sin is committed, and then in seeking the way out of a present inconvenience, he entangles himself in more: he scruples not to use indirect arts to avoid the consequence of his fault; he covers one sin with another; and the more he strives to disentangle himself, the more he is *snared in the work of his own hands.* Into what perplexities did David's sin bring him? Such as by all his power and art he could not free himself from; he was glad to commit a *greater* crime to avoid the shame of *a less; and could* find no other way to con-

ceal his adultery, but by plunging himself into the guilt of murder. And thus it is proportionably in all other vices. The ways of sin are *crooked paths*, but the way of holiness and virtue is a *highway*, and lies so plain before us, that *wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*, Isa. xxxv. 8. There needs no skill to keep oneself true and honest; if we will but resolve to deal justly, and to speak the truth to our neighbour, nothing in the world is easier; no artifice and reach are required to enable us to speak as we think, and to do to others as we would be done by.

And as the ways of sin are full of intricacy, so likewise of trouble and disquiet; no man's conscience ever troubled him for not being dishonest; no man's reason ever reproached him for not being drunk; no man ever broke his sleep, or was haunted with fears of divine vengeance, because he was conscious to himself that he had *lived soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world.* But with the ungodly it is not so: there is no one knowingly wicked, but he is guilty to himself; and he that carries guilt about him, has received a sting into his soul, which makes him restless, so that he can never have perfect ease and pleasure in his mind.

Sixthly, If we will but put a religious and a wicked course of life in equal circumstances; *if we will* but suppose a man as much accus-

)med to the one, as he has been to the other, doubt not but the advantages of ease and pleasure will be found to be on the side of religion; and if we do not put the case thus, we make an unequal comparison; for there is no one when he first begins a wicked course, but feels a great deal of regret in his mind; the terrors of his conscience, and the fears of damnation, are very troublesome to him. It is possible, that by degrees he may harden his conscience, and by a long custom of sinning may, in a great measure, wear off that tender sense of good and evil that makes sin so uneasy: but then if, in the practice of a holy life, we may, by the same degrees, arrive to far greater peace and quiet of mind than ever any wicked man found in a sinful course; if by custom virtue will come to be more pleasant than ever vice was, then the advantage is plainly on the side of religion; and this is truly the case. It is troublesome at first to begin any new course, and to do contrary to what we have been accustomed to; but let us habituate ourselves to a religious life, and the trouble will go off by degrees, and unspeakable pleasure succeed in the room of it. It is an excellent rule which a wise heathen (Pythagoras) gave to his scholars, "pitch upon the best course of life;" resolve always to do what is most reasonable and virtuous, "and custom will render it the most easy." There is no difficulty

in a good life, but what may be conquered b custom, as well as the difficulties of any othe course; and when we are once used to it, th pleasure of it will be greater than of any othe course.

So that, upon consideration of the whole there is no reason why we should be deterre from a holy and virtuous life for fear of the la bour and pains of it; because every one tha is wicked takes more pains in another way and is more industrious only to a worse pur pose. Now he who can travel in deep an foul ways ought not to say that he cannot wal in fair. He who ventures to run upon a pre cipice, when every step he takes is with dan ger of his life and his soul, ought not to pre tend any thing against the plain and safe path of religion, which will entertain us with plea sure in the course of our journey, and crow us with happiness at its end.

SERMON V.

OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF CHRISTIANS TO A HOLY LIFE.

2 Tim. ii. 19.

Let every one that nameth the name of Chris depart from iniquity.

We all call ourselves Christians, and would very much offended at any man that wo

this title; but let us not deceive our-
with an empty and insignificant name:
call ourselves Christians, let us make
d our profession by a suitable life and prac-
ce; and to persuade us thereto, I shall do
these two things:

First, Show what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives.

Secondly, Endeavour to persuade those who call themselves Christians to answer this obligation.

I. As to the obligation which the profession of Christianity lays upon men to lead holy lives, he who calls himself a Christian, professeth to entertain the doctrine of Christ, to live in the imitation of his holy example, and to have solemnly engaged himself to all this.

1. He who calls himself a Christian, professes to entertain the doctrine of Christ; to believe the whole gospel; to assent to all the articles of the Christian faith, to all the precepts, promises, and threatenings of the gospel. Now the great design of this doctrine is to take men off from sin, and to direct and encourage them to a holy life. It teaches us what we are to believe concerning God and Christ; not to entertain our minds, but to better our lives; for every article of our faith is a proper argument against sin, and a powerful motive to obedience. The whole history of Christ's appearance in the world; the dis-

courses and actions of his life, and the sufferings of his death; all tend to the destroying of sin: so St. John tells us, *For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil,* 1 John iii. 8. But this is most expressly declared to us by St. Paul, *The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,* Tit. ii. 11—13.

The gospel strictly commands holiness, and that universal; *to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,* 2 Cor. vii. 1; *to abstain from all kind of evil,* 1 Thes. v. 22; *to be holy in all manner of conversation,* 1 Pet. i. 15. It requires us to endeavour after the highest degrees of holiness that are attainable by us in this imperfect state, *to be holy as he that hath called us is holy,* 1 Pet. i. 15; *to be perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect,* Matt. v. 48.

All the promises of the gospel are so many encouragements to obedience and a holy life; *having therefore these promises,* let us cleanse ourselves *from all filthiness of flesh* and Spirit, an

perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Cor. vii. 1. We are told by St. Peter, that these exceeding great and precious promises are given to us, that by them *we might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust*, 2 Pet. i. 4; and that we might *give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity.*

And the threatenings of the gospel are so many powerful arguments against sin; therefore the apostle calls the gospel the power of God unto salvation, because therein the *wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, Rom. i. 17, 18. So that if we call ourselves Christians, we profess to embrace the holy doctrine of the Christian religion, which is perfectly opposite to all wickedness; to be governed by those laws which strictly enjoin holiness and virtue; and to be persuaded that all the promises and threatenings of the gospel are true, which offer such glorious rewards to obedience, and threaten disobedience with such dreadful punishments.

2. He who calls himself a Christian professeth to live in the imitation of Christ's example, and to follow his steps *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* The Son *of God came into the* world not only by his *doctrine to instruct* us in the way to happiness

and by his death to make expiation of sin; but by his life to be an example to us of holiness and virtue; therefore in Scripture we find several titles given him which relate to this character, as of a prince, a captain, a master, and a guide. Now, if he be our pattern, we should endeavour to be like him; *to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus; to walk in love as he also hath loved us, and given himself for us.* We should make it our sincere endeavour to please God and do his will, and to fulfil all righteousness as he did. Does any man profess himself a Christian, and yet abandon himself to intemperate and filthy lusts? Is this like our Saviour? Are we cruel and unmerciful? Is this like the high-priest of our profession? Are we proud and passionate, malicious and revengeful? Is this to be like-minded with Christ, who was meek and lowly of spirit, who prayed for his enemies, and offered up his blood to God on the behalf of them that shed it? If we call ourselves Christians, we profess to have the life of Christ continually before us, and to be always correcting and reforming our lives by that pattern.

3. He who calls himself a Christian has solemnly engaged to renounce all sin, and to live a holy life. By baptism we have solemnly taken upon us the profession of Christianity, and engaged ourselves to renounce the devil and all his works, and obediently to keep

God's commandments. And this obligation we renew as often as we receive the blessed sacrament of Christ's body and blood; therefore the cup in the sacrament is called the new covenant in his blood; that is, this represents the shedding of Christ's blood, by which rite the covenant between God and man is ratified. And as by this God confirms his promises to us, so we oblige ourselves to be faithful and obedient to him; and *if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth;* that is, after we are become Christians, *we account the blood of the covenant a common thing;* or we make nothing of the most solemn rite that ever was used in the world for confirmation of any covenant, the shedding of the blood of the Son of God.

II. I come now to the second thing proposed; and that is, to persuade those who profess Christianity to answer the obligations to a holy life, which their religion lays upon them. And in order to this I will urge these three considerations:

First, The indecency of the contrary.

Secondly, The great scandal of it to our blessed Saviour, and his holy religion.

Thirdly, The infinite danger of it to our own souls.

First, Consider how unbecoming it is for a man to live unsuitably to his profession. If we call ourselves Christians, we profess to be *instructed* by the best master; to be the dis-

ciples of the most perfect institution that ever was in the world; to have embraced a religion which contains the most exact rules for the government of our lives; which lays down the plainest precepts, sets before us the best patterns of a holy life, and offers us the greatest assistances and encouragements to this purpose; we profess to be furnished with the best arguments to excite us to holiness and virtue, to be awed with the greatest fears, and animated with the best hopes of any men in the world.

Now, whoever makes such a profession as this, obliges himself to live answerably; to do nothing that shall contradict it. What is more absurd than for a man to act contrary to his profession; to pretend to great matters, and to perform nothing of what he pretends to?

If we profess to believe the Christian religion, we expose ourselves to the scorn and contempt of every discerning man, if we do not live up to it. With what face can he continue in the practice of any known sin, who professes to believe the holy doctrine of the gospel, which forbids all sin under the severest penalties? If we did but believe the history of the gospel, as we do any ordinary credible story; did we but regard the laws of Christianity, as we do the laws of the land; were we but persuaded hat fraud, oppression, lying, perjury, intem-erance, uncleanness, covetousness, pride, ma-e, revenge, neglect of God and religion, will

bring men to hell, as certain as treason and felony will bring them under the sentence of the law; had we but the same awe and regard for the threatenings and promises of the gospel, that we have for the frowns and smiles of those who are in power; even this would be effectual to keep us from sin: and if the gospel have not this effect upon us, it is an argument that we do not believe it.

It is to no purpose to go about to persuade men that we heartily entertain the doctrine of Christ, (that doctrine which hath all the characters of piety and justice, of holiness and virtue, upon it; which obligeth men to *whatsoever things are true, honest, chaste, lovely, and of good report*), if we have no regard to it in our lives. He that would know what a man believes, let him attend rather to what he does, than to what he says; he that leads a wicked life makes a more effectual profession of infidelity, than he who in words only denies the gospel. If we profess ourselves Christians, it may justly be expected from us that we should live at another rate than the heathens did; that we who worship a holy and just God, should not allow ourselves the liberty of sin as those did who worshipped such gods as were examples of sin, and patterns of their vices.

When thou art ready to debase thyself to *any vile lust*, remember that thou art a Christian; *consider* what title thou bearest, by wha *name thou* art called, whose disciple thou a

and then say to thyself, shall I allow myself in any impiety or wickedness of life, who pretend to be instructed by that grace of God, which teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts? Shall I cherish any sinful passion, who pretend to have mortified all such, and to have *put off the old man with his deeds?*

It is not being gilded over with the outward profession of Christianity that will avail us; our religion must inwardly change us. What the Apostle says concerning circumcision, we may apply to them that are baptised, and make an outward profession of Christianity. *Baptism verily profiteth if we obey the gospel; but if we walk contrary to the precepts of it, our baptism is no baptism, and our Christianity is heathenism,* Rom. ii. 25. If by our lives and actions we contradict that religion which we profess, we by this very thing prove ourselves to be counterfeits and hypocrites; and that we have only taken up our religion for a fashion, and received it according to custom; we were born in a country where it was reverenced, and therefore we are of it; and the reason why we are Christians, rather than Jews, Turks, or Heathens, is because the Christian Religion had the fortune to come first in our way, and to bespeak us at our entrance into the world.

Are we not ashamed to take up a profession *upon such slight* grounds, and to wear about *us such an* empty title? It should make our *blood to rise* in our faces, to consider what a

a distance there is between our religion and our lives. Justly may it be expected that so perfect an institution as the gospel is, which the Son of God came from heaven to propagate, should make men more strictly holy and virtuous, and set the professors of it at a greater distance from all impurity and vice than ever any institution in the world did. If a man profess any other art or calling, it is expected he should be skilled in it, and excel those who do not pretend to it. It is the greatest disparagement to a physician to say of him, that he is in other respects an excellent man, only he has no great skill in diseases, and the methods of cure; because this is his profession: He might be pardoned for other defects, but the proper skill of his art may justly be expected from him. So for a Christian: to say of him, the worst thing in him is his life; he is very right in his opinions, but he is an ill-natured man, one of very violent passions, he will be frequently drunk, he makes no conscience of his dealings, he is very uncharitable to all that differ from him; this man is faulty in his profession; he is defective in that which should be his excellency; he may have right opinions in religion; but when all is done there is no such error and heresy; nothing so fundamentally opposite to religion, as a wicked life: a Christian does not pretend to have a better wit, or a more piercing understanding than a Turk

or Heathen; but he professeth to live better than they, to be more chaste, temperate, just, charitable, meek, gentle, loving, and peaceable, than other men; if he fail in this, where is the art the man boasts of? To what purpose is all this stir about the gospel, and the holy doctrine of Christ? If any man profess himself a Christian, and do not live better than others, he is a mere pretender in religion, a bungler in his own art, and unskilled in his proper profession.

Secondly, Consider how great a scandal this must be to our blessed Saviour and his holy religion. The Christian Religion hath undergone many hard censures for the miscarriages of the professors of it; the impieties and vices of those who call themselves Christians have caused many sharp reflections upon Christianity.

If a man designed to do the greatest spite to religion, he could not take a more effectual course to disparage it than by a lewd and debauched life; for this will still be an objection in the minds of those who are strangers and enemies to Christianity: If the gospel were so excellent an institution as it is reported to be, surely we should see better effects of it in the lives of those who profess it; for if there were neither a heaven to be hoped for, nor a hell to be feared after this life, how could many Christians live worse than they do?

This consideration ought greatly to affect us; I am sure the Apostle speaks of it with great earnestness; *Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.* Phil. iii. 18. A Jew or Turk is not so great an enemy to Christianity, as a lewd and vicious Christian. Therefore let me beseech Christians, as they tender the honour of their Saviour, and the credit of their religion, that they would conform their lives to the holy precepts of it. It were really better, upon some accounts, that they who are resolved to continue in a vicious course should abandon their profession, than keep on a vizard, which serves to no other purpose but to scare others from religion.

Thirdly, Let us consider the danger we expose ourselves to by not living answerably to our religion. And this, I hope, may prevail upon such as are not moved by the former considerations. Hypocrites are instanced in Scripture as sinners that shall have the sharpest torments. When our Saviour would set forth the great severity of the Lord towards the evil servant, he expresseth it thus: *He shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion among hypocrites.* Matt. xxv. 51; so that the punishment of hypocrites seems to be made the standard of the highest punishment. Thou

›fessest to believe in Christ, and to hope in
n for salvation, but in the mean time thou
:st a wicked and unholy life; thou dost not
ieve but presume on him; and wilt find at
great day, that this thy confidence will be
· confusion. He whom thou hopest will be
· advocate and Saviour, will prove thy ac-
er and thy judge. What our Saviour says
:he Jews, *there is one that accuseth you, even*
ses in whom ye trust, John v. 35, may very
l be applied to false Christians; there is
: that accuseth you, and will condemn you,
n Jesus in whom you trust.

The profession of Christianity will be so far
n securing us from hell, that it will sink us
deeper into it. Many are apt to pity the
›r heathen, who never heard of the name of
rist, and sadly to condole their case; but,
our Saviour said upon another occasion,
ep not for them, weep for yourselves: there is
such miserable person in the world as a de-
erate Christian, because he falls into the
atest misery from the greatest opportunities
being happy. Dost thou lament the con-
on of the most virtuous among the Pagans,
doubt what shall become of them at the
· of judgment; and canst thou, who art an
›ious and profane Christian, think that thou
t escape the damnation of hell? Dost thou
re that the moral heathen shall be cast
and canst thou, who hast led a wicked

life under the profession of Christianity, have the impudence to hope that thou shalt sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God? No, those sins which are committed by Christians under the enjoyment of the gospel, are of deeper dye, and clothed with blacker aggravations, than the sins of heathens are capable of. A Pagan may live without God in the world, and be unjust towards men, at a cheaper rate than thou who art a Christian. Better it had been thou hadst never known one syllable of the gospel, never heard of the name of Christ, than that having taken it upon thee thou shouldst not depart from iniquity. Happy had it been for thee that thou hadst been born a Jew, a Turk, or a poor Indian, rather than that being bred among Christians, and professing thyself of that number, thou shouldst lead a vicious and unholy life.

I have insisted the longer upon these arguments, that I might, if possible, awaken men to a serious consideration of their lives, and persuade them to a real reformation of them; that all of us, who call ourselves Christians, might plainly see our obligations to live up to the fundamental laws of our religion; to love God and our neighbour, and to do to others as we would have them do to us; to mortify our lusts, and subdue our passions, and sincerely endeavour to grow in every grace and virtue, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness

which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

This indeed would become our profession, and be honourable to our religion; and would remove one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the gospel. For how can we expect that the doctrine of God our Saviour should gain any considerable ground, so long as by the unworthy lives of so many Christians, it is represented to the world at so great a disadvantage! If ever we would have Christianity effectually recommended, it must be by the holy and unblameable lives of those who make profession of it. Then, indeed, it would look with so lovely a countenance, as to invite many to it; and carry so much majesty and authority in it, as to command reverence from its greatest enemies, and make men to acknowledge that God is in us of a truth, and to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

The good God grant that as we have taken upon us the profession of Christianity, we may be careful so to *live, that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; that the grace of God which bringeth salvation may teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* To whom with the Father *and the Holy Ghost, &c.*

SERMON VI.

OF THE HAPPINESS OF A HEAVENLY CONVERSATION.

PHIL. iii. 20.

For our conversation is in heaven.

To have our conversation in heaven implies these two things:

First, The serious thoughts and considerations of heaven.

Secondly, The effect which these thoughts and considerations ought to have upon our lives.

I. Concerning heaven, or the state of good men in another life, two things principally offer themselves to our consideration: 1. The happiness of this state; and, 2. The way and means whereby we may partake of this happiness.

First, We will consider the happiness of this state: but what and how great that is, I am not able fully to represent. The Scriptures have revealed so much in general concerning it as may serve to inflame our desires after it, and quicken our endeavours for obtaining it; namely, that it is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world; that it is very great; that it is eternal; and, in a word, far above any thing that we can now conceive.

1. It is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world. It is free from the sharp and bitter ingredients which abate and allay the enjoyments of this life: all these are mixed, uncertain, and unsatisfying; nay, the very sweetest of them are cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are unmixed. There is something of vanity mingled with all of them, and that causes vexation of spirit. Every sensual pleasure is purchased by pains, is attended with it, or ends in it. A large estate is not to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor lost without trouble. Power is commonly uneasy to those that have it, and envied by those that have it not. Knowledge is one of the sweetest pleasures of human life; and yet, if we may believe the experience of one who had as great a share of it as any of the sons of men ever had, he will tell us, *that this also is vexation of spirit; for in much wisdom there is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow,* Eccl. i. 17. Thus the best things of this world have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and sorrow in them; but the happiness of the next life is free from all allay. In heaven only are pure joys, and unmingled felicity.

And as our enjoyments here are mixed, so *are they uncertain*; for which reason Solomon *very elegantly* calls them things that are not. *Why wilt thou set thine eyes* upon that which is

not; for riches certainly make to themselves wings, and fly like an eagle towards heaven. So fugitive are they, that after all our endeavours to secure them, they break loose from us, and in an instant vanish out of our sight. He who enjoys the greatest happiness on earth, still wants this—that what he possesses may be secured to him. But the happiness of heaven is steady and constant, fixed and unchangeable as its author, *with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.*

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unsatisfying. This is the vanity of vanities that every thing can trouble us, but nothing give us satisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are so fantastical, that we can neither be well with them, nor without them. If hungry, we are in pain; if we eat to the full, we are uneasy; if poor, we think ourselves miserable; and when we come to be rich, we often are really so. If in a low condition, we fret and murmur; and if we get up in the world, we are many times further from content than we were before: so that we pursue the happiness of this life, as children chase birds, when we think we are come very near it, and have it almost in our hands, it flies farther from us than it was at first.

Nay, so far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us satisfaction, that the sweete

are most apt to cloy us. All of them, indeed, are so contrived as to yield us but very little happiness. If they go off quickly, they signify nothing; and if they stay long, we are sick of them. After a full draught of any sensual pleasure, we loathe it, and hate it as much after the enjoyment, as we longed for it in the expectation. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full satisfaction, so we shall never be weary of them. Every repetition will be accompanied with a new happiness. In the felicities of heaven these two things shall be reconciled, which never met together in any sensual delight, long and full enjoyment, and yet a fresh and perpetual pleasure. *As in God's presence there is fulness of joy, so at his right hand there shall be pleasures for evermore.*

2. The happiness of the other life is not only incomparably beyond any happiness of this, but it is very great in itself. It is usually in holy writ described by such pleasures as are manly and excellent, infinitely more pure and refined than those of sense; and if, at any time, the Scripture descends to the metaphors of a feast—a banquet—a marriage,—it is plainly in condescension to our capacities. But the chief ingredients of this happiness, so far as divine wisdom has thought fit to reveal it to us, are the perfection of our knowledge, the height of our love, the perpetual society and

friendship of all the blessed inhabitants of heaven, and their joyful concurrence in cheerful expressions of gratitude, and in incessant praises and admiration of the fountain and author of this bliss. And what can be more delightful than to have our understandings entertained with a clear sight of the most perfect being, with the knowledge of his works, and the wise designs of his providence; than to live in the reviving presence of God, and continually to attend on him whose favour is life, and whose glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greatest of them is above the poorest worm.

But then, besides the improvement of our knowledge, there shall be the most delightful exercise of love. When we come to heaven, we shall enter into the society of the blessed angels, and of *the spirits of just men made perfect;* that is, freed from all those infirmities which now render the conversation even of the best of men sometimes troublesome to one another. And this blessed society, being all united by love, shall join in gratitude *to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain, to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;* and shall sing everlasting songs of praise to God for all his works of wonder; for the effects of that infinite goodness, and admirable wisdom, and

almighty power, which are clearly seen in the creation and government of the world; for his favours to mankind; for the benefit of their beings; for the comfort of their lives; and for all his merciful providences towards them in this world; but above all, for the redemption of their souls by the death of his Son; for the forgiveness of their sins; for the gracious assistance of his holy spirit; and for conducting them safely through all the snares and dangers, troubles and temptations of this world, to the secure possession of that glory and happiness which they shall then be partakers of.

3. This happiness shall be eternal. And though this be but a circumstance, and does not enter into the nature of our happiness, yet it is so material a one, that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. God hath so ordered things, that the inconsiderable delights of this world should be transient, but that the great and substantial pleasures of the other should be as lasting as they are excellent; for heaven, as it is an exceeding, so it is an eternal weight of glory. And to be thus secured in the possession of our happiness is that which completes it, and banishes all fear and trouble from the minds of the blessed.

O vast eternity! how dost thou swallow up *our thoughts*, and entertain us at once with *delight and amazement*! This is the very

height of happiness; here we may stand secure, and look down with scorn upon all things below! And how inconsiderable do they appear, compared with the vast and endless enjoyments of a future state! But oh! vain and foolish souls! to be so little concerned as we are for eternity! To deprive ourselves of everlasting felicity, for the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season! Blessed God, why hast thou prepared such a happiness for those who never seek after it! *Why is such a price put into the hands of fools, who have no heart to make use of it!* Prov. xvii. 16; who fondly choose to gratify their lusts rather than to save their souls, and sottishly prefer the temporary enjoyments of sin before a blessed immortality!

4. The happiness of heaven is far above any thing that we can now conceive. In this imperfect state we are not capable of a full representation of the glories of the other. *We cannot now see God and live. We are now but children, and we speak as children, and understand and think as children* concerning these things. But in the other state we shall grow up *to be men,* and then we shall *put away* these *childish thoughts; now we know but in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is imperfect shall be done away; now we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face; now we know in part, but then we shall know even as also we are known,* 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 11.

The second thing to be considered concerning our future happiness, is, the way whereby we may be made partakers of it; and that, in short, is by the sincere endeavours of a holy life, in and through the mercies of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. He indeed is the author of our salvation, but obedience is the condition of it. So the apostle tells us, *that Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*, Heb. v. 1. It is the *grace of God* in the gospel that brings or offers this *salvation to us;* but then it is *by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*, that we are *to wait for the blessed hope*, Tit. ii. 12, 13. Our Saviour promises this happiness *to the pure in heart*, Matt. v. and elsewhere the Scripture excludes all others from any share in this blessedness. So the Apostle assures, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14.

And holiness is not only a condition, but a necessary qualification for the happiness of the next life. So that if we live wickedly, if we allow ourselves to indulge in the practice of any known sin, we render ourselves unfit for eternal life. By this means we defeat all the designs of God's grace and mercy towards us, and make ourselves incapable of that happiness which he offers. Heaven is, in Scripture, called an *inheritance among* them that are sanctified, and the inheritance of the saints in light.

So that it is not enough that this inheritance is promised to us, but we must be *meet to be partakers of it.*

And this life is the time of our preparation for our future state. Our souls will continue for ever what we make them here; such a temper and disposition of mind as we carry with us out of this world, we shall retain in the next. It is true indeed heaven perfects the holy and virtuous dispositions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main state; *he that is filthy will be filthy still; and he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous still.* If we do not in a good degree mortify our lusts and passions here, death will not kill them, but we shall carry them with us. And if God should admit us, so qualified, into the place of happiness, yet we should bring that along with us, which would infallibly hinder us from being happy. Our sensual desires would meet with nothing there that would be suitable to them; and we should be perpetually tormented with those appetites which we brought with us, because we should find nothing there to gratify them. For, as the Apostle says in another sense, *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* The happiness of heaven consists in things for which the wicked have no relish; so that if a covetous, or ambitious, or voluptuous person,

was in heaven, he would be just like the rich man in hell, tormented with a continual thirst, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent desires; and would not be able to find so much as one drop of suitable pleasure to quench and allay that heat. So likewise as to our fierce and unruly passions: if we should carry them into the other world, how inconsistent would they be with happiness? They would not only make us miserable, but be a trouble to all those with whom we should converse. Vain man! that dreamest of being happy, without any disposition and preparation for it. All the joys of heaven are purely spiritual, and are only to be relished by those who have purified themselves as God is pure: but if thou be carnal and sensual, what are these things to thee? What happiness would it be to thee to have him always in thy view who was never in thy thoughts?—to be tied and live for ever in his company who is of a quite contrary disposition to thyself? Whose presence thou dreadest, and whom, whilst thou wast in this world, thou never couldst endure to think upon? Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt souls to breathe in, and the whole employment and conversation of that place, as it would be unsuitable, so would it be unacceptable to a sensual and vicious person.

From all this it appears how necessary it is *for us to prepare* ourselves for this blessed state,

by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every lust and inordinate passion in our souls; for till this be done we are nor meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world. So much for the first thing implied in my text, to wit, the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven.

II. To have our conversation in heaven implies likewise the effect which those considerations ought to have upon our hearts and lives; as,

1. To convince us of the vanity of this world. God has on purpose made this world troublesome to us, that we might find no sufficient temptation to take us off from the care of our future happiness; that heaven might have no rival here below; and that there might be nothing in this world to pretend to our affection, or court us with any advantage, in comparison of everlasting life and glory.

When we come to die, and eternity shall present itself to our serious and waking thoughts, things will put on another face, and what we valued most will then appear to be worth nothing; but such as we neglected will be judged of infinite concern, and worthy to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives. And if we would consider these things in time, while the opportunities of life and health are before us, we might be convinced at a cheaper rate, and come to be satisfied of the vanity of

this world, before we despaired of the happiness of the other.

2. A second effect which these considerations ought to have upon our lives is, to make us very active both to be as good, and to do as much good as we can, that so we may be qualified for everlasting happiness. As often as we consider the glories that are above, how does it accuse our sloth, and condemn our folly, that we are less concerned for our souls, than most men are for their bodies; that we will not labour half so much for an eternal inheritance, as men commonly do for these corruptible things?

Let us remember that we are hastening apace to another world, and that our eternal happiness now lies at stake. How should it quicken our endeavours to have such a reward set before us! Would we but often represent to our minds the glorious things of another world, what fervours should we feel in our hearts; we should be all life, and spirit, and wing, and should do God's will almost with the same readiness and delight, as the angels do, who continually behold the face of their Father. The consideration of heaven should actuate all the powers of our souls, and inspire us with new vigour in the ways of holiness and virtue. How should this thought confirm our purposes of obedience, that if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end will be everlasting life.

3. A third effect which these considerations ought to have upon us, is, to mitigate the evils and afflictions of this life: these affect us more or less according as our souls are fortified with considerations proper to support us under them. When we reflect that we have but a little while to be here, that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly country, where we shall meet with all the delights we can desire, it ought not to trouble us much to endure storms and foul ways, and to want many of those accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of travellers, and we must take things as we find them, and not look to have every thing just to our minds. These difficulties will shortly be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. The more trouble we have gone through, the kinder usage we shall find when we come to our Father's house. So the Apostle tells us, that *our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* Our happiness will then be as real as our miseries were here upon earth, and far greater, and more lasting. And what mighty matter is it though we suffer awhile in this world, provided we escape the unspeakable torments of the next; though we have not our good things *in this life, if infinitely* better be reserved for *us.*

Several of the evils of this life would indee

be insufferable, were there nothing better to be hoped for in another. If this were true, Christians would be then of all creatures the most miserable. But our religion has abundantly assured us to the contrary. And this assurance made the first Christians embrace the greatest sufferings with cheerfulness; glory in tribulation, and *take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and more enduring substance.*

4. A fourth effect, which the consideration of heaven ought to have upon us is, to make us sincere in all our professions, words, and actions. Did we firmly believe the rewards of another world, our religion would not be only in show, but in reality. No man would put on a form of godliness, who was destitute of the power of it; we should do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to God and our own consciences: for in the next life we shall not be rewarded for what we seem to be in this, but for what we really are. Therefore whatever we think, or speak, or do, we should always remember, that the day of revelation is coming, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, when all disguises shall be laid aside, and all our actions and designs shall be brought upon the public stage, and exposed to the view of men and angels. *There is nothing now hidden which shall not then be revealed*, nor secret which *shall not be made known.*

5. A fifth effect which the consideration of

heaven should have upon us is, to arm us against the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the dread of it is infinitely increased by the apprehensions of what may follow it; but the comfortable hopes of a blessed immortality strangely relieve the fainting spirits of dying men; and are able to reconcile us to death.

We, certainly, have never more need of comfort than when we are struggling with this last enemy; and there is no such consolation to a departing soul as the hopes of a happy eternity.

He who looks upon death only as a passage to glory, may welcome the messengers of it, as bringing him the most joyful news that ever came to him; and no one can stay in this world with half the comfort that this man leaves it.

And now I have done with the two things implied in this phrase of having our conversation in heaven, to wit, the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven; and the effects of these upon our hearts and lives: I shall conclude with some reflections upon what has been delivered concerning the happiness of good men after this life. I am very sensible how much all that I have said comes short of the greatness and dignity of the subject, so that I could almost begin again and make a new attempt. And indeed, who would not

be loth to be taken off from so delightful a theme? Methinks it is good for us to let our minds dwell upon these considerations: we are unworthy of heaven, and unfit to partake of so great a glory, if we cannot take pleasure in the contemplation of those things now, the possession whereof shall be our happiness for ever.

With what joy then should we think of those *great and glorious things which God hath prepared for them that love him; of that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which fadeth not away, reserved for us in the heavens?* How should we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour, when we shall make our escape out of these prisons,—out of this *howling wilderness into the promised land;* when we shall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill-natured world; when we shall be past all storms, secured from all further danger of shipwreck, and safely landed in the regions of bliss and immortality?

O blessed time! *when all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and death and sorrow shall be no more,* when *mortality shall be swallowed up of life,* and we shall enter into possession of all that happiness and glory which God has promised, our faith has believed, and our hopes raised us to expect! When we shall be eased of all our pains, resolved of all our doubts, *purged* from all our sins, freed from all our

fears, and blessed beyond all our hopes, and have all this happiness secured to us beyond the power of time and change! when we shall know God and other things without study, love him and one another without measure, serve and praise him without weariness, and obey his will without reluctance; and shall be more and more delighted in knowing, loving, praising, and obeying him to all eternity!

How should these thoughts affect us, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives? The great disadvantage of the arguments fetched from another world, is, that those things are at a distance from us, and not sensible to us; and therefore are not apt to affect us so strongly, and to work so powerfully upon us. Now to make amends for this disadvantage, we should often revive these considerations in our minds, and press upon ourselves the reality and certainty of these things, together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We should reason thus with ourselves; if good men shall be so unspeakably happy, and consequently wicked men so extremely miserable in another world; if these things be true, and will one day be found to be so, why should they not be to me, as if they were already present? Why should not I be as much afraid to commit any sin as if hell were naked before me, and I saw the astonishing miseries of the damned? And why should

not I be as careful to serve God and keep his commands, as if heaven were open to my view?

The lively apprehensions of the nearness of death and eternity are apt to make men's thoughts more quick and piercing; and, according as we think ourselves prepared for our future state, to transport us with joy, or amaze us with horror. For he that is fully satisfied of his future bliss is already entered into heaven, has begun to take possession of glory, has, as it were, his blessed Saviour in his arms, and may say with Simeon, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* But the thoughts of death must be very terrible to him, who is doubtful or despairing of his future condition. It would daunt the stoutest man that ever breathed, to look upon death, when he can see nothing but hell beyond it. When the apparition at Endor told Saul, *To-morrow thou and thy sons shall be with me,* he was struck to the heart, so that *he fell down to the ground, and there was no more strength left in him.* It is as certain that we shall die, as if an express messenger should come to every one of us from the other world, and tell us so. Why should we not then always live as those that must die, and as those that hope to be happy after death? To have these apprehensions vigorous and lively upon our minds, this is to have our conversation

heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.

SERMON VII.

OF THE DECEITFULNESS AND DANGER OF SIN.

HEB. iii. 13.

Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

FROM these words I shall,

I. Endeavour to represent the growing danger of sin, and by what steps and degrees bad habits insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil course.

II. Take occasion to exhort you with all earnestness to resist the beginnings of sin; or, if already entered upon a wicked course, to make haste out of this dangerous state, *lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

I. To represent the growing danger of sin, and by what steps and degrees bad habits insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in

794309 A

an evil course. All our actions, which are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have something of difficulty in them, when we begin them; but after awhile they become more easy; when they are easy we begin to take pleasure in them; when they please us we do them frequently; by frequency of acts a thing grows into a habit; a confirmed habit is a second kind of nature; and so far as any thing is natural, so far it is necessary, and we can hardly do otherwise; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. And this is the natural progress of all habits.

But as the corrupt nature of man is a rank soil, the habits of vice are of a quicker growth. Our minds have need to be prepared for piety and virtue; they must be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains; but vices are weeds that grow wild, and spring up of themselves. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder if occasion and temptation easily draw it forth.

But that we may take a more distinct view of the progress of sin, and see by what steps vice gains upon men, I shall mark out some of the chief and more observable.

1. Men begin with lesser sins. None are perfectly wicked on the sudden. By degrees we proceed to greater and fouler crimes. For *vice* hath its infancy and tender age, and *several states of* growth. Men are not so totally

degenerate, but at first they are ashamed when they venture upon a known sin, though it be but small in comparison; hence it is that at first they are very solicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuses; but after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too visible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them; and from thence they come to take pleasure in them, and in those that do the same things.

2. By the frequent commission of these lesser sins, men are prepared and disposed for greater; such as lay waste the conscience, and offer more violence to the light and reason of their minds. By degrees a sinner may grow so hardy as to attempt those crimes which he once could not have thought of committing without horror. Like Hazael, who when he was told by the prophet Elisha what barbarous cruelties he should be guilty of towards the people of Israel, when king of Syria, he abominated the very thought of them; *Is thy servant,* says he, *a dog, that he should do this great thing?* And yet, for all this, we know he afterwards did it. It is true, indeed, when a sinner is first tempted to the commission of a more gross and notorious sin, his conscience is apt to start at it, and he does it with regret; the terrors of his own mind, and the fears of damnation, are very troublesome to him; but this trouble wears off by degrees, and that which was at first difficult, by

frequent practice, and long custom, becomes tolerable.

3. When a man has proceeded thus far, he begins to put off shame, one of the greatest restraints from sin that God hath laid upon human nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to restrain and hold us in.

4. After this, it is possible, men may come to approve their vices. For if our judgments do not command our wills, and restrain our lusts, it is great odds but in process of time our vicious inclinations will put a false bias upon our judgments; and then it is no wonder if men come to boast of their sins, and to glory in their vices, when they are half persuaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that some men have got so perfect a habit of some sins, as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them. As in the case of swearing, to which many have so accustomed themselves, that, without any consideration, they of course put an oath or two into every sentence that comes from them. And it has been observed of some, that they have told an untruth so often, till at last, forgetting that it was a lie at first, they themselves have believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedness men commonly proceed to draw in others, and to make

proselytes to their vices. Now this signifies not only a great approbation of sin, but even a fondness for it; when men are not content to sin upon their own single accounts, but they must turn zealous agents and factors for the devil; become teachers of sin, and ministers of unrighteousness.

And when they are arrived to this height, it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to resist the means of their recovery; to quarrel against all the remedies that shall be offered them, and to count those their greatest enemies who have so much courage and kindness as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wise counsels of God's word, and the most gentle and prudent admonitions tendered to such persons, serve only to provoke their scorn or their passion. And surely that man is in a sad case who is so disposed that in all probability he will turn the most effectual means of his amendment into the occasion of new and greater sins.

But what renders the condition of such persons much more deplorable is, that all this while God is withdrawing his grace from them: and not only so, but that evil spirit, which the Scripture tells us *works effectually in the children of disobedience*, does, according as men improve in wickedness, get a greater and more *established* dominion over them. For as they *who are reclaimed* from an evil course are sai

in Scripture to be *rescued out of the snare of the devil*, and to be *turned from the power of Satan unto God;* so, on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of sin, so much the farther they depart from God, from under the influence of his grace, and the care and protection of his providence.

And thus, by passing from one degree of sin to another, the sinner becomes hardened in his wickedness, and insensibly slides into that state, in which, without a miraculous grace of God, he is like for ever to continue. For the mind, after it has been accustomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almost as hard to be rectified, as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to its first straitness. The Scripture speaks of some that *commit sin with greediness*, and that *drink up iniquity as an ox drinketh up water*, with a mighty appetite and thirst; and they who have brought themselves to this pass, are almost under a fatal necessity of sinning on. I do not believe that God hath predestinated any man to ruin; but, by a long course of wilful sin, we may in a sort predestinate ourselves to it; we may choose wickedness so long till we have brought ourselves under all imaginable disadvantage of contributing any thing towards our own recovery; being bound in the chains *of our own* wickedness, and held in the cords *of our sins*: nay, like Samson, not only bound *by those* lusts which we have embraced, but

likewise robbed of all our strength whereby we should break loose from them. God grant that none of us may ever have the woful experience of it; but I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a sinner may arrive to that confirmed state of impiety as almost totally to lose his liberty to do better. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?* It is the Scripture comparison to set forth how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodness that has been long accustomed to do evil. He who is thus deeply engaged in a bad course will scarce ever have the resolution to break loose from it, unless he be violently forced by some severe affliction, by a sharp sickness, by a terrible calamity, or by the present apprehensions of death, and the terrors of a future judgment. Nor will these be effectual to change such a person without an extraordinary degree of God's grace; which, considering the greatness and the continuance of his provocations, he has very little reason to hope God should ever bestow upon him. Wretched man! that hast brought thyself into this miserable state, out of which there is but just a possibility left of thy being rescued; that hast neglected thy disease so long till it is almost too late to apply remedies; that hast provoked God so far, and sinned to such a prodigious height, that thou hast reason almost to despair both of his assistance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I speak not this to discourage even t

greatest of sinners from repentance. Though their case be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite desperate: *For those things which seem impossible with men, are possible with God.* But I speak it on purpose to stop sinners in their course, and to discourage men from going on in sin till they be hardened through the deceitfulness of it, and have brought themselves by insensible degrees into that dangerous and difficult state which I have been representing to you.

II. I come in the second place to the work of exhortation commanded in my text. And here I shall address myself to two sorts of persons:

1. To those who are yet innocent of great crimes: Vice may easily be discouraged at first: it is like a slight disease, which, in the beginning, is easy to be cured, but is dangerous when neglected. The first approaches of sin are usually very modest, but if they be not discountenanced, it will soon make bolder attempts. All vice stands upon a precipice, and every compliance with temptation is going down the hill: while we keep our standing we may command ourselves; but if once we put ourselves into motion downward, we cannot stop when we please. If we give way to presumptuous sins, they will quickly get dominion over us. It is absurd for a man to think of setting bounds to himself in any thing that is bad; to resolve to sin in number, weight, and measure, with great temperance and discre

tion, and government of himself; to resolve that he will commit this sin, and then give over; entertain but this one temptation, and after that admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts, when once in motion, are like the raging sea, to which we can set no bounds, nor say to it, *hitherto shalt thou go and no further.* Sin strangely gains upon men, when they once give way to it. Complying with a small crime marvellously disposes a man for a greater. As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, so vices are linked together, and one sin draws many after it. When the devil tempts us to commit any wickedness, he does as it were lay a long train of sins, and if the first temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us therefore resist the beginnings of sin, because then we have most power, and sin has the least.

2. Let me apply myself to those who are already engaged in a wicked course, and endeavour to persuade them to make haste out of this dangerous state, *lest they be hardened at length through the deceitfulness of sin.* And there is no other way to get out of such a state but by repentance; that is, by a real change and reformation of our lives; for herein the nature of true repentance consists. Without this *change, all our* sorrow, and fasting, and humiliation *for* sin, will signify nothing. There *is an excellent* passage of the son of Sirach to

this purpose, *He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? So is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again, and doth the same things; who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling himself profit him?* There is this plain difference between trouble for sin and repentance: sorrow only respects sins past, but repentance prevents them for the future: and God therefore requires that we should be troubled for our sins, that we may resolve to leave them.

And to oblige us to a vigorous and speedy resolution in this matter, let us consider that we have engaged too far already in a bad course, and that every day our retreat will grow more difficult; that by delays we make work for a sadder and longer repentance than that which we now so studiously decline: let us consider likewise that our life is concerned in the case; *that except we repent and turn we shall die;* and that the evil day may overtake us while we are deliberating whether we shall avoid it or not; that vice is so far from being mortified by age, that by every day's continuance in it we increase the power of it; and so much strength as we add to our disease, we *certainly* take from ourselves; and this is a *double* weakening of us, when we not only lose our strength, but the enemy gets it and employs it against us. The deceitfulness of sin

appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this necessary work, and persuading them to hazard all upon the unreasonable hopes of the mercy of God, and the uncertain resolution of a future repentance. Every body here, I believe, is satisfied that to delay repentance till death approaches puts things upon a mighty hazard; and they have a great deal of reason to be so: for alas! how unfit are most men at such a time for so great and serious a work, when they are unfit for the smallest matters! And how hard is it for any man then to be assured of the truth of his repentance, when there is no sufficient opportunity to make trial of its sincerity. It is, indeed, much to be feared, that the repentance of a dying sinner is usually but like the sorrow of a malefactor at the time of his execution; he is not troubled that he hath offended the law, but he is troubled that he must suffer for it. For when death is ready to seize upon the sinner, no wonder if then he is desirous to go to heaven rather than hell; and, in order to that, is ready to give some testimonies of his repentance; no wonder if, when the rack is before him, it extorts confession from him; and if, in hopes of a pardon, he makes many large promises of amendment, and freely declare his resolution of a new and better life. But then it is the *hardest thing in* the world to judge whether all *this, that is* done under so great a fear and force

be real; for such a man, as he has lost a
petite to the most pleasant food, so likewi
sinful pleasures are at the same time nau
to him, and for the very same reason:
ness having altered the temper of his bod
has not then any relish for these things.
is resolved against sin as one that hath n
mach is resolved against meat. But if t
were over, and death would but remove a
farther from him, it is to be feared tha
former appetite would soon return to
and that he would sin with the same e
ness he did before. Besides, how can w
pect that God should accept of our repen
at such a time, when we are conscious t
selves that we resolved to put it off til
could sin no longer? Can we think it
any man to say thus to God in a dying
"Lord, now the world leaves me, I come
thee. I must confess that I could nev
persuaded to leave my sins out of love to
but now I repent out of fear of thee. I am
scious to myself that I would never do
thing for thy sake, but yet I hope thy
ness is such that thou wilt forgive all th
godliness of my life, and accept of this f
submission which I now make to thee. I
thee do not at last disappoint me in the d
which I laid, of sinning while I live, and ge
to heaven when I die." Surely no ma
think it fit to say thus to God; and ye

afraid this is the true interpretation of many a man's repentance, who has deferred it till he comes to die. I do not speak this to discourage repentance even at that time. It is always the best thing we can do. But I would by all means discourage the delay of so necessary a work till then: for to speak the best of a death-bed repentance, it is a very dangerous remedy, especially when men have designed to rob God of the service of their best days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable sighs and tears at the hour of death. I desire to have as large apprehensions of the mercy of God as any man, but withal I am very sure he is not to be imposed upon. And no man, that has any worthy conceptions of him, can imagine him to be so easy, as to forgive men upon the least intimation of their minds; and to have such a fondness for offenders, as would reflect upon the prudence of any magistrate and governor upon earth. God grant that I may sincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to die; and that I may never be so unwise as to venture all my hopes of a blessed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with those excellent sayings of the son of Sirach, *Say not, God's mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins; for mercy and wrath is with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out displeasure:*

and as his mercy is great, so are his corrections also. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed. Humble thyself before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be justified.

SERMON VIII.

OF THE INWARD PEACE AND PLEASURE WHICH ATTENDS RELIGION.

PSALM CXIX. 165.

Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.

MY design at present is, To recommend religion from that inward peace and pleasure which attend it? and this I shall do by considering these three particulars:

I. That religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet.

II. That it furnishes us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

III. That the reflection upon a religious course of life, and all the actions of it, yields *great pleasure* and satisfaction.

. Religion is apt to remove the chief causes inward trouble and disquiet: which are se two; doubting and anxiety of mind, l guilt of conscience.

. Religion is āpt to free us from doubting l anxiety of mind. Irreligion makes a man of doubts and jealousies whether he be in right, and whether at last things will not ve quite otherwise than he has rashly deter- ıed: and the reason hereof is plain, be- ıse the endeavour to settle ourselves in the nciples of irreligion is an endeavour against ure and those vigorous instincts which God h planted in our minds. Whereas he who ertains the principles of religion, and is not ıscious to himself that he lives contrary to se principles, has no anxiety in his mind, ng sure that he has taken the wisest course, ıaving consulted his own present peace and ıre safety.

:. Another, and indeed a principal cause of ıble and discontent, is guilt: from this, re- on either preserves us, or clears us. It pre- ves us from guilt by keeping us innocent; l it clears us of it, by leading us to amend- nt; which is the only way to recover the our of God, and the peace of our own con- ences: it secures us against all apprehen- ıs of danger from the divine justice; and *ugh not absolutely* from all fear of punish- *t in this* world, yet from that which is the

greatest danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. By this means a man's mind is settled in perfect peace; religion freeing him from those tormenting fears of the divine displeasure, which he can upon no other terms rid himself of. Whereas the sinner is always sowing the seeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying the foundation of continual discontent.

II. As religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and disquiet, so it ministers to us all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind. Whoever lives according to the rules of religion lays these three great foundations of peace and comfort to himself.

1. He is satisfied that he does that which is most reasonable. And it is no small pleasure to be satisfied that we are what we ought to be, and do what in reason we ought to do. Piety, and the other graces and virtues which religion teaches, are things reasonable in themselves, and what God, when he made us, intended we should practise. A man is pleased with himself and his own actions, when he does what he is convinced he ought to do; and is offended with himself when he goes against the light of his own mind by neglecting his *duty, or* doing contrary to it; for then his *conscience* checks him, and there is something *within him* that is uneasy, and puts him into *disorder*; as when he eats or drinks any thing

that is unwholesome it offends his stomach, and puts his body into an unnatural and restless state.

For every thing is at rest and peace when in that state in which nature intended it to be, but being forced out of it, is never quiet till restored to it. Religion, and the practice of its virtues, is the natural state of the soul, the condition to which God designed it. As he made man a reasonable creature, so all the acts of religion are reasonable and suitable to our nature: and our souls are then in health when we are what the laws of religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an inexpressible ease and pleasure when our body is in its perfect state of health, and, on the contrary, pain and uneasiness when it is distempered; so is it with the soul. When religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds and the course of our lives are conformable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when they are otherwise, and we live in any vicious practice, how can there be peace? How can we hope to be at ease so long as we are in a sick and diseased condition? Till the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our spirits will be in a perpetual tumult, and it is as impossible for us to enjoy peace and serenity of mind, as it is for a sick man to be at ease. We may use what arts of diversion we please, and

change from one place and posture to another, but still we are restless, because there is that within us which gives us pain, *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* Such men may dissemble their condition, and put on the appearance of cheerfulness and content; but God, who sees the heart, knows it is far otherwise with them.

2. Another ground of peace which the religious man has, is, that he has made God his friend. Whoever sincerely endeavours to please God, may rest perfectly assured, that God has no displeasure against him, for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance shall behold the upright;* that is, he will be favourable to such persons. As *he hates the workers of iniquity,* so *he takes pleasure in them that fear him; in such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.*

And being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears, and may say with David, *Return then unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee; the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* What can reasonably trouble that man who has made his peace with God, and is restored to the favour of him who is the best and most powerful friend, and can be the sorest and most dangerous enemy.

3. By being religious, we most effectually consult our own interest and happiness. A great part of religion consists in moderating our appetites and passions, and this naturally tends to the composure of our minds. He that lives piously and virtuously not only secures his present peace, but, likewise, lays the foundation of his happiness to all eternity; for religion gives us hopes of eternal life; and all pleasure does not consist in present enjoyment; there is a mighty pleasure also in the firm expectation of a future good; which expectation, if it be of a great and lasting good, will support a man under many present evils. If religion be certainly the way to happiness at last, we may contentedly bear many afflictions for its sake. For though all sufferings be grievous, yet it is pleasant to come to the possession of a mighty good, though it be with difficulty. And when we come to heaven (if ever we be so happy as to get thither) it will add to our pleasure to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were saved and made happy.

So that all these put together, are a firm foundation of peace and comfort to a good man. There is great satisfaction in doing our duty, and acting reasonably, though there may happen to be some present trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we not only satisfy ourselves in so doing, but likewise please him whose favour is better than life, and whose

frowns are more terrible than death; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happiness, and in serving God do most effectually serve our own interest; what can be imagined to minister more peace and pleasure to the mind of man?

III. The reflection upon a religious and virtuous course of life yields a mighty pleasure and satisfaction. And what can commend religion more to us than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives us so much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty we may find in doing it, there is sure to be peace and satisfaction in looking back upon it. No man ever reflected with regret upon his having done his duty to God or man; upon his having *lived soberly, righteously, and godly.* On the contrary, the consciousness of any duty faithfully discharged, the memory of any good we have done, refreshes the soul with a surprising kind of pleasure and joy. *Our rejoicing is this,* saith St. Paul, *the testimony of our consciences, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*

But in the course of a vicious life, all acts of impiety, of malice and injustice, of intemperance and excess, certainly leave a sting behind. Whatever pleasure there may be in the present act of them, the memory of them is so tormenting, that we are glad to use all the arts

of diversion to fence it off. One of the greatest troubles in the world to a bad man is to look into himself, and to remember how he has lived. I appeal to the consciences of men whether this be not true.

Now is there not a mighty difference between these two courses of life? When we do a thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is soon over, but the pleasure of it is perpetual: when we do a wicked action, the pleasure of it is short, but the trouble and sting of it remains for ever! The reflection upon the good we have done gives a lasting satisfaction, but the remembrance of any evil committed leaves a perpetual discontent.

What is yet more considerable, a religious and virtuous course of life yields most peace and comfort when we most stand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conscience: this makes all bright within, when there is nothing but obscurity without. So David observes, *Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness*, Ps. cxii. 4. All the pious and virtuous actions that we do are so many seeds of peace and comfort sown in our consciences, which will spring up and flourish most in times of outward trouble and distress: *Light is sown for the righteous*, and gladness for

the upright in heart. And at the hour of death; *the righteous hath hopes in his death,* saith Solomon. What a seasonable refreshment is it, when the pangs of death are coming on us, and we are just stepping into the other world, to be able to look back upon a religious and well-spent life? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man overflow, a kind of heaven springs up in his mind, and he rejoiceth in the hopes of the glory of God. And that is a true and solid comfort indeed, which will stand by us in the day of adversity, and stick close to us when we have most need of it.

But with the ungodly it is not so.—When eternity, that fearful and amazing sight! presents itself to his mind, when he feels himself sinking into the regions of darkness, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the just reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the sins of his life? How full of rage and indignation is he against himself for having neglected to know, when he had so many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belong to his peace? and which, because he has neglected them, are now, and likely to be for ever, hid from his eyes.

And if this be the true case of the righteous and wicked, I leave it to any man's thoughts which of these he would be. Surely the dif-

ference between them is so very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now, though this discourse be very true, yet it will be but fair to consider what may be said on the other side; and the rather, because there are several objections that seem to be countenanced from experience, which is enough to overthrow the most plausible speculations.

As, first, That wicked men seem to have a great deal of pleasure in their vices.

Secondly, That religion enjoins many things which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of.

Thirdly, That those who are religious are often very disconsolate and full of trouble.

To the first, I deny not that wicked men have some pleasure in their vices; but it is the lowest and meanest kind of pleasure. It is the pleasure of our bodies and our senses, of our worst part; the pleasure of the beast, and not of the man; that which least becomes us, and which we were least of all made for. Those sensual pleasures that are lawful, are much inferior to the least satisfaction of the mind; those that are unlawful are always inconsistent with it. And *what is a man profited*, if to gain a little sensual pleasure he lose the peace of his own soul? Can we call that pleasure which robs us of far greater and higher satisfaction than it brings? The delights of sense are so far from

being the chief pleasure for which God designed us, that, on the contrary, he intended we should take our chief pleasure in restraining and moderating our sensual desires, and keeping them within the bounds of reason and religion.

And the pleasures of sin are as short as they are low or mean. The fits of mirth which wicked men have, how soon are they over? like a sudden blaze which, after a little flash and noise, is presently gone. It is the comparison of the great and experienced Solomon, *Like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool;* that is, the mirth of the wicked man: it may be loud, but it lasts not.

But, what is most considerable, the pleasures of sin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miseries which they draw after them: many times poverty and reproach, pains and diseases upon our bodies; *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil.* So that, if these pleasures were greater than they are, we had better be without them than purchase them at so dear a rate.

Secondly, It is said, that religion enjoins many things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have *spoken of*; as, the bearing of persecution, *repentance* and mortification, fasting and absti-

nence, and many other severities. As to persecution; this discourse does not pretend that religion exempts us from outward troubles; but that, when they happen, it supports us under them better than any thing else. Repentance and mortification chiefly concern our first entrance into religion after a wicked life, which I acknowledge to be very grievous; but though religion may be troublesome at first to some persons whose former sins have made it so, it will yet be pleasant afterwards when they are accustomed to it; and whatever the trouble of repentance be, we should consider it as the means to prevent our being miserable; for *except we repent we must perish.* Now there is always a rational satisfaction in submitting to a less inconvenience to avoid a greater. As for fasting and abstinence, which is many times very helpful and subservient to the ends of religion, there is no trouble in it, if it be discreetly managed, that is worth speaking of. And as for other severities, which some pretend religion imposes, I have only thus much to say, that if men will play the fool, and make religion more troublesome than God has made it, this is what I cannot help; and that it is a false representation of religion which some in the world have made, as if it chiefly consisted not in pleasing God, but in displeasing and tormenting ourselves.

The third objection, that those who are r ligious are many times very disconsolate a full of trouble, I should confess a material o indeed, if religion were the cause of t trouble; but there are other plain causes of in which religion, rightly understood, is way accessary; such are,

1. False and mistaken principles of religio as this for one, That God has from all et nity effectually barred a great part of manki from all possibility of attaining the happin which he offers to them; and every one ha cause to fear that he may be in that numb A melancholy consideration this, if it we true; but there is no ground either from re son or Scripture to entertain any such thoug of God. Our destruction is of ourselves, a no man who does not ruin himself by his o fault, shall be ruined by any decree of God.

2. Another cause of the trouble express by religious persons, is, the imperfection their religion and obedience to God. So perhaps are very devout in serving God, b not so kind and charitable, so just and hon in their dealings with men. No wonder such persons be disquieted; the consciences men being apt to disquiet them for nothi more, than the neglect of those moral duti which natural light teacheth them. Peace *conscience* is the effect of an impartial and u

versal obedience to the laws of God; and no body, I hope, will blame religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of it.

3. A third cause of the disquiet sometimes seen in religious persons, is, a melancholy temper and disposition; which is not from religion, but from our nature and constitution; and therefore religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, religion, rightly understood and sincerely practised, is sure to bring to the minds of men. And I know not by what sort of argument it can be more effectually recommended; for in persuading men to be religious, I do not go about to rob them of any true pleasure; but to direct them to the very best, nay indeed the only way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in pity and compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but grievously mistake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have set before you, a holy and virtuous life, *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. A good man,* says Solomon, *is satisfied from himself.* He has the pleasure of being wise, and acting reasonably, *of being* justified to himself in what he *does, and of being* acquitted by the sentence

of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent, because it prevents guilt and trouble: it is pleasant to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others: and it is pleasant to grow better, because that is to excel ourselves. It is naturally pleasant to rule over others, but he is the great and the absolute prince who commands himself: this is *the kingdom of God within us;* a dominion infinitely to be preferred before all *the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them:* it is the *kingdom of God* described by the apostle, *which consists in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* In a word, the pleasure of being good and doing good is the chief happiness of God himself.

The wicked man deprives himself of all this pleasure, and creates perpetual discontent to his own mind. O the torments of a guilty conscience! which the sinner feels more or less all his life. But alas! thou dost not yet know the worst of it, no, not in this world! What wilt thou do when thou comest to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thyself? Or what comfort can any one else give thee, when thy conscience is miserably rent and torn by those waking furies which will then rage in thy breast, and thou knowest not which way to turn thyself for ease?

Therefore whatever temptation there may be in sin at a distance, whatever pleasure in the

commission of it, yet remember that it always goes off with trouble, and will be bitterness in the end. Those words of Solomon have a terrible sting in the conclusion of them, *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

This one thought, which will very often unavoidably break into our minds (that *God will bring us into judgment*) is enough to spoil all the pleasure of a sinful life. Never expect to be quiet in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thyself, till thou livest a virtuous and religious life.

And if this discourse be true (as I am confident I have every man's conscience on my side) I say, if this be true, let us venture to be wise and happy; that is, to be religious. Let us resolve to break off our sins by repentance, to *fear God and keep his commandments,* as we desire to avoid the unspeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneasy to ourselves.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we may every one of us know and do in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes. And the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the

sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant; make us perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us always that which is well pleasing in his sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON IX.

THE NATURE AND BENEFIT OF CONSIDERATION.

PSALM CXIX. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

IN these words two things are considerable:

I. The course which David here took for reforming his life; *I thought on my ways.*

II. The success of this course: it produced actual and speedy reformation; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

I. We will consider the course which David here took for reforming his life; *I thought on my ways:* and this may either signify a general examination of his life, respecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it; or else, which is more probable, it may particularly refer to

the sins and miscarriages of his life; *I thought on my ways;* that is, I called my sins to remembrance.

1. This thinking on our ways may signify a general examination of our lives, respecting indifferently our good and bad actions: *I thought on my ways;* that is, I examined my life, and called myself to a strict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the law of God, the rule and measure of my duty, and considered how far I had obeyed that law, or offended against it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in comparison of what I might and ought to have done; that by this means, discerning how many and great my faults were, I might amend whatever was amiss, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it must be of excellent use for men to set apart some particular time for the examination of themselves, that they may rightly judge of their religious state. A wise heathen (Pythagoras) particularly recommends this practice to his scholars, "every night before they slept, to call themselves to account for the actions of the day past, inquiring wherein they had transgressed; what good they had done or omitted to do." And this, no doubt, is an admirable means to improve us in virtue; a most effectual way to keep our conciences continually waking and tender, and to make us

stand in awe of ourselves, and afraid to sin, when we know beforehand that we must give so severe an account of every action.

It is certainly great wisdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in some measure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives; and that we may not be oppressed by the insupportable weight of the sins of a whole life falling upon us at once, perhaps at the very worst time, when we are sick and weak, and have neither understanding nor leisure to recollect ourselves. For there is nothing to be done in religion when our reason is departed from us. But though we were never so sensible, when death is near, and should do all we can at that time; yet after all this, how it will go with us, God alone knows. I am sure it is too much presumption for any man to be confident that one general and confused act of repentance will serve his turn for the sins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reason why we should often examine ourselves, both in order to the amendment of our lives, and the ease of our consciences when we come to die.

2. This thinking on our ways may particularly refer to the sins and miscarriages of our *lives. I thought on my ways;* that is, I called *my sins* to remembrance; I took a particular *account of* the errors of my life, and laid them *seriously* to heart; and reasoning the matter

thoroughly with myself, came to a fixed resolution of betaking myself to the obedience of God's laws. And the consideration of our ways, taken in this sense, (which seems to be the more probable meaning of the words) may reasonably imply in it these following particulars:

1. The taking a particular account of our sins, together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them. And to this end we may do well to reflect particularly upon the several stages of our lives, and to recollect at least the principal miscarriages belonging to each of them. The better to enable us to do this, it will be useful to have before our eyes some abridgment or summary of the laws of God, containing the chief heads of our duties and sins, of virtues and vices; which will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, that otherwise perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We should likewise consider the several relations wherein we have stood to others, and how far we have transgressed or failed of our duty in any of these respects.

And having thus far made up our sad account, we may in some measure understand the number and greatness of our sins, abating for some particulars which have slipped our memory, and for sins of ignorance and daily infirmities, which are innumerable: by all which we may see what grievous offend

we have been, especially if we take into consideration the several circumstances of our sins, which above measure aggravate them; the heinousness of many of them as to their nature, and the injurious consequences of them to the person, estate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, against the frequent checks of our consciences, against so many motions of God's Holy Spirit, so many admonitions from others; and contrary to our own most serious vows renewed at several times, especially upon receiving the blessed sacrament, and in times of sickness and distress: and all this, notwithstanding the plainest declarations of God's will to the contrary; notwithstanding the terrors of the Lord, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; notwithstanding the cruel sufferings of the Son of God for our sins, and the most merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood. Add to this, the scandal of our wicked lives to our holy religion; the ill example of them to the corrupting of others; the affront of them to the divine authority; and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy, and goodness, and patience of God, to which we have such infinite obligations. Thus we should set our sins in order before our eyes, with the several aggravations of them.

2. The consideration of our ways may impl

a hearty trouble and sorrow for sin: *I thought on my ways;* that is, I laid my sins sadly to heart. And surely, whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be sensibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but be in pain and heaviness. I know that the tempers of men are different; and therefore I do not say that tears are absolutely necessary to repentance, but they very well become it; and a thorough sense of sin will almost melt the most hard and obdurate disposition. To be sure, the consideration of our ways should cause inward trouble. The least we can do, when we have done amiss, is to be sorry for it; to condemn our own folly; to be full of indignation against ourselves for what we have done, and to resolve never to do the like again. Let us make sure that our sorrow for sin have this effect, to make us leave our sins; and then we shall need be the less solicitous about the outward expressions of it.

3. The thinking on our ways may imply, a serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course. Sin is the stain and blemish of our natures, the reproach of our understandings, the disease of our souls, the great enemy of our peace, and the cause of all our fears and troubles. Whenever we do a wicked action, we go contrary to the clearest dictates of our reason, to our true interest, and to the strongest ties and obligations of duty ar gratitude. And, which renders it still m

unreasonable, sin is an evil which we
bring upon ourselves. Other evils
forced upon us, but no man is wicked
his own choice. How do we betray
and weakness, by suffering every foo
and passion to hurry us into actions w
know to be hurtful to us, and so base
worthy in themselves that we are ash
do them, not only in the presence o
man, but even of a child or a fool! S
sin was followed, with no other pur
but the guilt of having done a shamef
one would not by intemperance make
a beast; one would not be false, unj
cherous, or ungrateful, if for no other
yet out of mere greatness and gene
mind, out of respect to the dignity o
ture, and out of reverence to his ow
standing. For let witty men say wl
will in defence of their vices, there are
natural acknowledgments of the unrea
ness of sin, that the matter is past al
It is very observable, that though th
part of the world always was bad,
has ever had more followers than vi
never was there any age so degen
which vice could get the better of
point of general esteem and reputatio
they whose wills have been almost en
sin, could never yet so far bribe an
their understandings as to make the
prove it

4. The consideration of our ways will lead us to a due sense of the fearful consequences of a wicked life. And these are so dreadful, and the danger of them so evident, that no temptation can be sufficient to excuse a man to himself for venturing upon them. A principal point of wisdom is to look to the end of things; not only to consider the present pleasure and advantage of them, but also the ill consequences of them for the future: and to balance these together.

Now, sin its own nature tends to make men miserable. It certainly causes trouble and disquiet of mind. And to a considerate man, who knows how to value his own peace, there cannot be a greater argument against sin, than that the forsaking of it is the only way to find rest to his soul.

Besides, every vice is naturally attended with some particular mischief and inconvenience, which makes it even in this life a punishment to itself; and commonly the providence of God, and his just judgment upon sinners, strike in to heighten the mischievous consequences of a sinful course. This we have represented to us in the parable of the prodigal; his riotous course of life naturally brought him to want, but the Providence of God likewise concurred to render his condition more miserable; *at the same time there arose a mighty famine in the land;* so that he not only wante *wherewithal* to supply himself, but was cat

from all hopes of relief from the abundan
others. Sin brings many miseries upo
and God many times sends more and gr
than sin brings; and the farther we go on
sinful course, the more misfortunes we in
ourselves in.

But all these are light and inconsiderab
comparison of the dreadful miseries of an
world; to the danger whereof every man
lives a wicked life every moment exposes
self: so that if we could conquer shame,
had stupidity enough to bear the reproac
our vices, and the temporal mischiefs an
conveniences of them; yet the consider
of the end and issue of a sinful course,
invincible objection against it. Though
violence of our sensual appetites should be
to bear down all temporal considerations,
methinks the interest of our everlasting h
ness should lie near our hearts; the consi
tion of another world should startle us;
horrors of eternal darkness, and the di
thoughts of being miserable for ever, sh
effectually discourage us from a wicked
And this danger continually threatens
sinner; and may, if God be not mercif
him, surprise him the next moment. And
we make too much haste to fly from so
and apparent a danger? When will we t
of saving ourselves, if not when (for ough
know) we are upon the very brink of ruin
just ready to drop into destruction?

5. Upon the consideration of our ways, naturally follows a full conviction of the necessity of quitting a wicked course. Whatever is necessary, is so in order to some end, and the greater that end, the greater is the necessity of the means without which it cannot be obtained. Now the chief and last end of all reasonable creatures is happiness; whatever therefore is necessary in order to that, has the highest degree of rational and moral necessity. We are not capable of happiness till we have left our sins; *for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*

But though we are convinced of this necessity, yet this does not always enforce a present change; because we hope to continue in our sins, and remedy all at last by repentance. But this is so great a hazard, there is no venturing upon it; and wise men, in matters of the greatest concern, will run no hazards, if they can help it. David was so sensible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance and the change of his life one moment; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* This day, this hour, for ought we know, may be the last opportunity of making our peace with God; therefore we should make haste out of this dangerous state. He that cannot promise himself the next moment, has a great deal of reason to seize upon the present. While we are lingering,

in our sins, if God be not merciful to us, we shall be consumed. Therefore *make haste*, sinner, *and escape for thy life, lest evil overtake thee.*

6. Lastly, The consideration of our ways will raise in us an apprehension of the possibility of making a thorough change. God, who designed us for happiness at first, and after we had forfeited it by sin, restored us to a capacity of it by the redemption of our blessed Lord and Saviour, has made nothing necessary to our happiness that is impossible for us to do, either of ourselves, or by the assistance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. So that notwithstanding the great corruption of our natures, since *the grace of God, which brings salvation, hath appeared*, it is not absolutely out of our power to leave our sins and turn to God: for that may truly be said to be in our power which God has promised to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourselves. There is nothing on his part to hinder it. He hath solemnly declared that he sincerely desires it, and that he is ready to assist our good resolutions to this purpose. And if there be no impediment on God's part, why should there be any on ours? One would think all the doubt and difficulty should be on the other side, whether God would be pleased to show mercy to such great offenders as we have been. But the business does not stick here. Will we

then be miserable by our own choice, when the grace of God has put it into our power to be happy?

II. I come, in the second place, to consider the success of this course, which David here took for the reforming of his life. It produced actual and speedy reformation; *I turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* If we consider the matter thoroughly, and have but patience to bring our thoughts and deliberations to some issue, the conclusion must naturally be the quitting of that evil and dangerous course in which we have lived; for sin and consideration cannot long dwell together. Did men but consider what sin is, they would have so many unanswerable objections against it, such strong fears and jealousies of the miserable event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not say that this change is perfectly made at once. A state of sin and a state of holiness are not like two ways just parted by a line, so as a man may step out of the one full into the other; but like two ways that lead to two very distant places; so that the farther we travel in the one, the farther we are from the other; and consequently the more time and pains it will cost us to reach it. It sometimes so happens, that a person, by a mighty conviction and resolution, and by a very extraordinary degree of God's grace, is almost perfectly

reclaimed at once, and all on a sudden *translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son.* Thus it was with many of the first converts to Christianity: as their prejudices against the Christian religion were violent, so the Holy Spirit of God was pleased to work mightily in them. But in the usual methods of God's grace, evil habits are subdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict; and many times, after they are routed, they rally and make head again; and 'tis a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable strength, and before the sinner comes to that confirmed state of goodness, that he may be said to have conquered and mortified his lusts. But this ought not to discourage us. For so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way; all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us; and if we pursue our advantages, we shall every day gain ground, the work will grow easier upon our hands; and we, who moved at first with so much slowness, shall after a while be enabled to run the ways of God's commands with pleasure and delight.

So much for the course prescribed in my text, and the success of it. To persuade men *to take* this course, I shall add,

1. That consideration is the proper act of *reasonable* creatures. This argument God

himself uses to bring men to reflect on their ways; *Remember, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.* Isa. xlvi. 8. To consider our ways, and to call our sins to remembrance, is to show ourselves men. 'Tis the great fault and infelicity of many, that they generally live without any consideration of the future consequences of things, and without fear but of a present and sensible danger; like the brutes who fear no evils but what are in view, and just ready to fall upon them: whereas, to a prudent and considerate man, a good or evil in reversion is capable of as true an estimation, proportionably to the greatness and distance of it, as if it were really present. And what do we think God has given us our understandings for, but to foresee evils at a distance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future happiness; to look up *to God our Maker, who hath taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven;* to consider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes most for our future and lasting interest, and what against it? Can a beast do worse than act without any consideration and design? than pursue his present inclination without any apprehension of true danger? The most stupid of all the brute creatures cannot exercise less reason than this. So that for a man not to consider his ways, is, to every intent and purpose, to be *without understanding, and like the beasts that perish.*

2. To bring us to consideration is the end
God's patience and long-suffering towards
The great design of his goodness is to *lead m*
to repentance. He bears long with us, dela
the punishment of our sins, and doth not ex
cute judgment speedily, because he would gi
us the liberty of second thoughts, time to refl
upon ourselves, to consider what we have do
and to reason ourselves into repentance. C
sider this, all ye that forget God, lest he tear y
in pieces, and there be none deliver you.

3. Consideration is what we must all co
to one time or other. Time will come wh
we shall consider and cannot help it; when
shall not be able to divert our thoughts fr
those things on which we are now so loath
think. Our consciences will take their opp
tunity to bring our ways to remembrance wh
some great calamity is upon us. Thus it
with the Prodigal, when he was brought to
very last extremity, and was ready to per
with hunger, he came to himself. When
come to die, then we shall think of our w
with trouble; and how glad would we then
that we had time to consider them! Perh
while we are wishing for more time, etern
will swallow us up. But alas! it will then
too late to consider. Consideration will th
serve only to aggravate our misery, to multi
our stings, and to give new life and rage
those vultures which will perpetually
upon our hearts. How much wiser wo

be to consider these things in time, to think of them while we may redress them, than when our case is desperate, and past remedy?

And now what can I say more to persuade every one of us to consider our own ways? We are generally apt to busy ourselves in observing the errors and miscarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and censure their faults and follies; but how few descend into themselves, and turn their eyes inward, and say, what have I done? It is an excellent saying of a great emperor, (Antoninus) No man was ever unhappy for not prying into the actions and conditions of other men; but that man is necessarily unhappy, who doth not observe himself, and consider the state of his own soul.

I know it is a very unpleasant work, which I am now putting you upon; and therefore no wonder that men are generally so backward to it: they whose lives have been very vicious are so odious a sight, so horrid a spectacle to themselves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways. Of all things they hate consideration, and are ready to say to it, as the evil spirit did in the gospel to our Saviour, *What have I to do with thee? Art thou come to torment me before the time?* But let not this affright us from it; for whatever trouble it may cause at present, it is the only way to prevent the anguish and the torments of eternity.

The things which I have offered to your
sideration are of great importance. They
cern not your bodies and estates, but that w
is more truly yourselves, your immortal
your dearest and most durable part; and
concern you not for a little while, but for
Let me therefore bespeak your most serio
gard to them in the words of Moses to the
ple of Israel, after he had set the law of
before them, *Set your hearts to the words*
I testify to you this day, for it is not a vain t
because it is your life. Deut. xxxii. 46.
life, your eternal life and happiness de
upon it.

Consider therefore what you have done
then consider what is fit for you to do;
you do it not, what will be the end of
things. And to help you forward in this
it is not necessary that I should expos
vices of the age, and set men's sins in orde
fore them; it is much better that you
selves should call your own ways to re
brance. We have a faithful monitor w
our own breasts, who, if we will but heark
him, will deal impartially with us, and
vately tell us all the errors of our lives.
this monitor I refer you, and to the gra
God, to make these admonitions effectual.

Let us then, every one of us, in the f
God, search and try our ways, and turn u
Lord. Let us *take* to ourselves words,

to God, with those true penitents in Scripture, *I have sinned, what shall be done unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. For surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more; that which I know not teach thou me; and if I have done any iniquity, I will do no more. O that there were such an heart in us! O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end!* And God of his infinite mercy inspire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy resolution, for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer: To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory now and for ever.

SERMON X.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF IRRESOLUTION AND DELAYING.

PSALM CXIX. 60.

I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

MY work at this time shall be to endeavour to convince men of the folly and unreasonableness of delaying the reformation of their lives: and to this end,

I. I shall consider the excuses alleged for delaying this necessary work, and show the unreasonableness of them.

II. I shall add some farther considerations to engage us effectually to set about this work without delay.

I. We will consider the excuses which men allege for delaying the reformation of their lives.

1. Many own that they are abundantly convinced of the great necessity of leaving their sins, and betaking themselves to a better course; and they fully intend to do so, only they cannot at present bring themselves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper, and then they resolve by God's grace to set about it in good earnest, and to go through with it. This, I am sure, is the greatest delusion that any man can put upon himself: it plainly shows that he does not intend to do what he is convinced is so necessary, but to put it off from day to day; for there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when, notwithstanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all respects better do it at present than hereafter, yet he still puts it off. Whatever he may pretend, this is a mere shift to get rid of a present trouble. It is like giving good words and making fair promises to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in

his own consience he shall be less able to pay the debt than he is at present. Whatever reasons thou hast against reforming thy life now, they will be in as full force hereafter; nay, probably stronger than they are at present. Thou art unwilling now, and so thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling: so that this reason will every day improve upon thy hands, and will have so much the more strength, by how much the longer thou continuest in thy sins. Thou hast no other reason against the present time, but only that it is present; and when hereafter comes to be present, the reason will be just the same. So that thy present unwillingness to reform is so far from being a just reason against it, that it is a good one the other way; because thou art unwilling now and like to be so, nay more so hereafter, if thou intendest to do it at all, thou shouldst set about it immediately and without delay.

2. Another pretence for delaying this reformation is the great difficulty and unpleasantness of it. And it cannot be denied but that there will be uneasiness in it proportionably to the growth of evil habits, the strength of our lusts, and our greater or less progress and continuance in a sinful course: so that we must expect a sharp conflict in making this change; and that it will cost us some pangs and throes

before we are born again. For when nat
hath been long bent, it is not to be recove
to its first straightness without pain and violer

But then it is to be considered, that l
painful soever this work be, it is necessa
that if we will not be at this pains now,
must one time or other be at far greater; t
it is not so hard as we imagine, but our fear
it are greater than the trouble will prove. If
were but once resolved upon a reformation,
seriously engaged in it, the greatest part of
trouble were over; it is like the fear of c
dren to go into cold water, a faint trial incre
their fear, but when once they have plun
themselves into it, they wonder why they w
afraid. The main difficulty is in our first
trance into religion; it presently grows to
able, and soon after easy; and after that
degrees so pleasant and delightful, that
man would not for the world return to his
mer evil course.

We should consider likewise what is the
cause of all this pain and difficulty: it is
long continuance in sin that has made us
loath to leave it: it is the custom of sinn
that renders it so troublesome to do otherw
It is because we have gone so far in an
way, that our retreat is become so diffic
and because we have delayed this work of
formation so long, that we are now so w

ling to go about it; and consequently the longer we delay it, the trouble and difficulty of a change will increase daily upon us. These considerations are all of them strong arguments against delaying. Because the work is difficult now, do not make it more so; and because your delays have increased the difficulty of it, and will increase it still more, therefore delay no longer.

3. Another pretended encouragement to these delays is, the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears longer with sinners, and therefore there is no such absolute necessity for a speedy reformation. Men have not the face to offer this as a reason, but yet it lies at the bottom of their hearts. So Solomon tells us, *because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.* Eccl. viii. 14.

But it is not always thus. There are few of us but have seen instances of God's severity to sinners, and have known or heard of several persons surprised and cut off in the very act of sin, without time or liberty so much as to ask God forgiveness, and to consider what they had done, or whither they were going. And this may be the case of any sinner, and is so much the more likely to be thy case, because thou dost so boldly presume upon the mercy and patience of God.

But if thou wert sure to be spared yet a while

longer, what can be more unreasonable tha
resolve to be evil because God is good;
because he forbears so long, to sin so m
longer; and because he affords thee a sp
for repentance, therefore to put it off to
last? The proper design of God's goodness i
lead men to repentance; and he never inte
ed his patience for an encouragement to
tinue in sin, but for an opportunity and a
ment to repent.

These are the pretences upon which men
lay the reformation of their lives, and you
how unreasonable they are; which was the
thing I proposed to consider.

II. I shall add some farther consideration
engage men effectually to set about this re
mation without delay.

1. Consider that in matters of great conc
and which must be done, there is no surer
gument of a weak mind than irresolution
be undetermined where the case is so plain,
the necessity so urgent. To be always inte
ing to live a new life, but never to find tim
set about it; this is as if a man should put
eating, and drinking, and sleeping, from
day and night to another, till he is starved
destroyed. It seldom falls under the delib
tion of any, whether they should live or no
they can choose; and yet it is much more
surd to deliberate whether we should li
berly, righteously, and religiously; for

to consult whether we should be happy or not. Nature has determined this for us, and we need not reason about it; and consequently we ought not to delay what we are convinced is so necessary in order to it.

2. Consider that religion is a work which requires so much time, that there is none left for delaying it. To begin with repentance, which is commonly our entrance into religion: this alone is a great work, and is not the business of a sudden thought and resolution, but of execution and action: it is the abandoning a sinful course, which we cannot leave, till we have in some degree mastered our lusts; for so long as they are our masters, like Pharoah, they will keep us in bondage, and *not let us go to serve the Lord.* The habits of sin and vice are not to be plucked up and cast off at once; as they have been long in contracting, so without a miracle it will require a competent time to get the victory over them; for they are conquered just by the same degrees that the habits of grace and virtue grow up and get strength in us. So that there are several duties to be done in religion, and often to be repeated, many virtues to be long practised, before the contrary vices will be subdued, and before we arrive to a confirmed state of goodness, such a state as can only give us a clear evidence of the sincerity of our resolution and repentance, and of our good condition towards God. We ha

many lusts to mortify, many passions to bring into order; and much good to do, to make what amends we can for the much evil we have done. We have many things to learn, and many to unlearn to which we shall be strongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits; and perhaps we may have satisfaction to make for many injuries done to others in their persons, estates, or reputations. In a word, we have a *body of sin* to put off, which clings close to us, and is hard to part with; we have to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God;* to increase and improve our graces and virtues; to *add to our faith knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness,* and *charity;* and *to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.* We have to be useful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous conversation; our *light is so to shine before men, that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.*

And do we think all this is to be done in an instant? That we may put off this work to the *last,* and yet do it well enough? Do we think *we can do* all this in time of sickness and old *age, when* we can hardly bear the infirmities *of nature,* much less a guilty conscience and a

wounded spirit? Do we think that having spent the day idly, we shall be fit to work when the night comes? When our understanding is weak, our memory failing, our will, by a long custom of sinning, obstinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in religion? What reasonable or acceptable service can we then perform to God? When our candle is just sinking into the socket, how shall *our light so shine before men, that others may see our good works?*

Alas! the longest life is no more than sufficient for us to reform ourselves in, to prepare our souls for another world, to train up ourselves for eternity, and to make ourselves *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*

3. Consider what a desperate hazard we run by delaying our reformation. It is uncertain whether hereafter we shall have time for it; and if we have, whether we shall have a heart to it, and the assistance of God's grace to go through with it. He, indeed, has been graciously pleased to promise pardon to repentance; but has no where promised life and leisure, the aids of his grace and Holy Spirit to those who put it off; he has no where promised acceptance to sorrow for sin, without *fruits meet for repentance,* and amendment of life; no where promised to receive those to mercy, who only give him good words, and are for leaving their sin

when they can continue in them no long
Many, in times of affliction and sickness, ha
gone so far as to be mightily troubled for th
wicked lives, and to make solemn professi
of becoming better; yet upon their deli
rance and recovery, all hath vanished; th
righteousness hath been as the morning clo
and as the early dew which passeth away. W
then should any man, merely upon account
a death-bed repentance, reckon himself in
better condition than those persons who ha
done as much, and gone as far as he; a
between whom and himself there is no diff
ence but this, that the repentance of the f
mer was tried and proved insincere, but t
death-bed repentance never came to a tri
Yet God knows whether it was sincere or n
and how it would have proved, if the m
had lived longer. Why should any one,
offering up to God the mere refuse of his li
and the days which *himself hath no pleasure*
expect to receive the reward of eternal life a
happiness?

But though we do not design to delay
repentance so long, yet ought we to consid
that all delays in a matter of this consequen
are extremely dangerous; because we put
an affair of the greatest concern to the futu
and in so doing hazard its ever being don
for, the future is as much out of our power
command, as it is to call back the time pa

It is in our power, under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, to amend our lives now, but it is not in our power to live till to-morrow; and who would part with an estate in hand, for an uncertain reversion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlasting concerns of our souls: We trifle away the present opportunities of salvation, and vainly promise ourselves the future; we let go that which is in our power, and fondly dispose of what is in the hands of God.

Lay hold then upon the present opportunities, and look upon every action thou dost as possibly thy last; for so indeed it may prove. If a man's life lay at stake, with what care would he manage the action on which it depended? What thou art doing next, may, for ought thou knowest, be for thy life, and for all eternity. So much of thy life is already past, and God knows thou hast yet done little towards securing thy future happiness! It is not certain how much or how little is remaining; therefore be sure to make the best of what is left, and wisely to manage the last stake.

4. Since the hopes that we shall hereafter repent, are the chief encouragement to delay our repentance, let us consider a little how unreasonable it is to take any such encouragement from these hopes. This is to do a thing in hopes that we shall be one day mightily ashamed of it; and heartily troubled that we

have done it; in hopes that we shall afterwards condemn ourselves for it, and wish a thousand times we had never done it; in hopes that we shall be full of horror at the thoughts of what we have done, that our consciences will make us a terror to ourselves, and drive us almost to despair. And is this a reasonable hope? Is this sufficient to encourage a wise man to any action? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of going on in our sins, in hopes that we shall hereafter repent of them.

5. If you be still resolved upon delay, consider well with yourselves, how long you intend it. Surely not to the last; not till sickness comes, and death makes his approaches to you. I hope none are so unreasonable; yet I fear that many have a mind to put off their reformation to old age. With this sort of men a wise Heathen (Seneca) excellently expostulates. "Who," says he, "shall ensure thy life till that time? Who shall pass his word, that the providence of God will suffer all things to happen as thou hast forecast them? Art thou not ashamed to reserve the reliques of thy life for thyself, and to set apart only that time to be wise and virtuous in, which is good for nothing? How late is it then to begin to live well, when thy life is almost at an end? What a forgetfulness is it of our mortality, to put off good resolutions to the fiftieth or sixtieth year of our age, and

to resolve to begin to do better at a time of life to which very few arrive."

But perhaps thou art not altogether so unreasonable, but desirest only to delay thy repentance till the heat of youth be over, and the cooler and more considerate part of thy life come on. Yet still we reckon upon uncertainties, for perhaps that season may never be; however, it is certainly more in our power, by the assistance of God's grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, to conquer our lusts now, and to resist the most violent temptations to vice, than either to secure the future time, or to recover that which is past.

Some seem more reasonable, and desire only to put off repentance for a very little while. But why for a little while? Why till to-morrow? To-morrow will be as this day, only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be then more unwilling and indisposed. So that there is no future time that any man can reasonably pitch upon. All delay, in this case, is dangerous. The only wise resolution to be here taken, is to embrace the present opportunity, because the matter will never be mended by tarrying.

6. Lastly, Consider what an unspeakable happiness it is to have our minds so settled, that we may with comfort and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never

far from any of us, and the general judgme may be nearer than we are aware of; *for that day, and hour, knoweth no man.* A these are two terrible things; nor can a thing free us from the dread of them, but good conscience; which is only to be had innocence, or repentance. Happy man! w by this means is at peace with God, and wi himself! and can think of death and jud ment without astonishment! For *the sting death is sin;* and the terror of the great d only concerns those who have lived wicked and would not be induced either by the m cies of God, or by the fear of his judgmen to repent. But if we have truly forsaken c sins, and do sincerely endeavour to live in ol dience to the laws of God, the more we thi of death and judgment, the greater will c joy and comfort be: for *blessed is that serva whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find doing.* Let us, therefore, instantly put o selves into this posture; according to that a vice of our blessed Lord, Luke xii. 35, 3 *Let your loins be girded about, and your lan burning, and ye yourselves like unto men t wait for their Lord.*

And now I hope that enough hath be said, to convince you of the unreasonablen and folly of delaying to reform your liv *nay,* I believe most are convinced of it in th *own consciences.* But, O that I knew wh

to say that might effectually persuade you to do that, which you are so abundantly convinced is so necessary.

And here I might address myself to the several ages of persons. You that are young, and have hitherto been in a good measure innocent, may by an early piety give God the first possession of your souls: you may do a glorious, I had almost said a meritorious, thing, in cleaving stedfastly to God, and resolving to serve him, when you are so hotly assaulted by the devil and the world. However, you may not live to be old; therefore, begin the work presently, and make use of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to ripeness of years, are to be put in mind, that the inconsiderateness of youth is now past; that reason and consideration are in their perfection; and yours is the very age of prudence and discretion: so that now is the proper time for you to be serious, and wisely to secure your happiness.

As for those that are old, they, methinks, should need nobody to admonish them, that it is now high time to begin a new life; and that the time already past of their lives is too much to have been spent in sin and folly. Your sun is certainly going down and near its setting; therefore you should quicken your pace. Alas, man! thou art just ready to die,

and hast thou not yet begun to live! Are thy passions and lusts yet unsubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? 'Tis strange to see how, in the very extremities of old age, many go on as if they had a thousand years to live; and make no preparation for death, though it be just ready to give them the fatal stroke.

Let us not then put off this necessary work of reforming ourselves in what age of life soever we may be: *to-day* let us begin it, *whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* Nay, to-day is with the latest to begin; had we been wise, we would have begun sooner. It is God's infinite mercy to us, that it is not quite too late; that the day of his patience is not expired, and the door shut against us: therefore do not defer your repentance: no man makes haste enough to be good, *to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well.* Be as quick as we will, life will be too nimble for us, and go on faster than our work does, and death will go nigh to surprise and prevent us.

Do not, sinner, abuse and neglect thyself yet longer, till the time of regarding thy soul and working out thine own salvation be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concern be slipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back *again; no,* not by thy most earnest wishes

and desires, by thy most fervent prayers and tears.

To conclude: Art thou convinced that thy eternal happiness depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Behave thyself then, in this case, as all prudent men are wont to do in things which thou canst not but acknowledge to be of far less concern. If a man be travelling, so soon as he finds himself out of his way, he has no inclination to go wrong any farther, but presently stops, and makes towards the right road: if he be sick, he will be well immediately if he can: most gladly take the first opportunity of being rich and great: who but catches at the very first offers of a great place, or a good purchase and secures them instantly? Do thou thus so much more in things so much greater. Return from the error of thy way; be wise, save thyself, as soon as possible. When happiness presents itself to thee do not turn it off, and bid it come again to-morrow. Perhaps the day of salvation may not be again offered to-morrow; nay, perhaps to thee to-morrow may never come. But if we were sure that happiness would come again, yet why should we put it off? Does any man know how to be safe and happy to-day, and can he prevail upon himself to delay it till to-morrow?

Now the God of all mercy and patience give every one of us wisdom and grace to

know and do, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes; for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever.

SERMON XI.

THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTER OF A GOOD AND BAD MAN.

1 JOHN iii. 10.

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.

BY the children of God, and the children of the devil, are meant good and bad men; it being usual in Scripture to call persons or things in this manner, as the reader will find in the sermon.

The text thus explained, I proceed,

I. To consider the mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here laid down; *whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.*

II. To show that by this mark every man may, with due care, come to the knowledge of his spiritual condition; *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.*

III. To enquire whence it comes to pass that, notwithstanding this, so many persons are at great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. I shall consider the mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is in the text, *Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God;* which implies likewise, on the contrary, that *whosoever doth righteousness is of God.* Now, in the strict sense of this phrase, he only who lives in all the commandments of God blameless, can be said to do righteousness; but in this sense *there is none that doeth righteousness, no not one;* and, consequently, none can be the children of God: but the text supposes some to be so; and therefore, by doing righteousness, the apostle must be understood to mean something that is short of perfect and unsinning obedience. So that the question is, What doing of righteousness is sufficient to denote a man a child of God?

It is not my design (it being perhaps impossible) nicely to determine this question; it will be sufficient to acquaint you what degrees of holiness are necessary to give you a clear and comfortable evidence of your good estate towards God, and then to persuade you, in order to your peace and assurance, to endeavour after such degrees. To do this, I shall *briefly* consider who they are that in the *apostle's* sense may be said to be doers of righteousness, or not doers of it.

In the first place, I shall inquire who are that may be said not to do righteousne

1. They that live in the practice of g and known sins, as injustice, intempera lewdness, neglect of God and religion that, by the whole course of their action is plain *there is no fear of God before eyes.*

2. They who live in the habitual practi any one known sin, or in the neglect of part of their known duty. For any vi habits puts a man into an evil state.

3. They who are guilty of the single a a very heinous and notorious crime; as liberate act of blasphemy, of murder, jury, fraud, or oppression, or of any crime of the like enormity: for though narily one single act of sin does not den man bad, when the general course of hi is contrary; yet the single acts of some are so heinous, that they are justly estee of equal malignity with vicious habits inferior kind; because they almost necess suppose a great depravation of mind, a monstrous alienation from God, in the p who deliberately commits them. And who are guilty in any of these three de now mentioned are most certainly not do *righteousness*, and, consequently, it is ma *they* are not the *children* of God.

In the second place, I shall inquir *they* are that in the apostle's sense

said to do righteousness. Such, in short, are they who in the general course of their lives keep the commandments of God: and thus the Scripture generally expresses this matter, by *keeping the commandments of God*, by *obedience to the gospel of Christ*, by being *holy in all manner of conversation*, by *abstaining from all kind of evil*, by *cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, and by *practising holiness in the fear of God*: all which expressions imply these two things: that the tenor of our lives and actions be agreeable to the laws of God; and that those actions be done with a sincere and upright mind, out of regard to God and another world, and not for any base end.

II. I shall endeavour to show, that by the mark of difference laid down in my text, every man may, with due care, arrive at a certain knowledge of his spiritual condition. *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* By which the apostle means, that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, whereby they very often manifest themselves to others; especially when the course of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriously impious and wicked. But because it does not so much concern us curiously to inquire into much less severely to censure the state

other men, I shall only consider at present how far by this mark every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this mark of difference, as I have explained it, he that is bad may certainly know himself to be so, if he does not wilfully deceive himself. As for those who are vicious in the general course of their lives, or have been guilty of some heinous sin not yet repented of; their case is so plain, for the most part, even to themselves, that they can have no manner of doubt about it. Such men stand continually condemned by the sentence of their own minds; and whenever they reflect upon themselves (which they do as seldom as they can) they are a terror to themselves, and are full of amazement and fearful expectation of judgment.

Those who are sinners of a lesser rate, and perhaps allow themselves only in one kind of vice, have reason likewise to conclude themselves in a bad condition; especially if they consider that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God is guilty of all, because he contemns that authority which enacted the whole law. And it is easy for us to discern the habit of any sin in ourselves, as when we frequently commit it; when we use no competent care to avoid the temptations to *it, nor* put forth any vigorous endeavours to *break off* from it; or, however, still continue

in the practice of it. For the customary practice of any known sin is utterly inconsistent with sincere resolutions against it; there being no greater evidence of the insincerity of resolutions, than still to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this mark likewise they who are sincerely good may generally be well assured of their good condition, and that they are the *children of God;* and there are but two things necessary to evidence this to them; that the general course of their actions be agreeable to the laws of God; and that they be sincere and upright in those actions. Both these every man may sufficiently know concerning himself; for if the laws of God be plain, and lie open to every understanding, then it is as easy for every one to know when he obeys God, and keeps his commands, as when he obeys the commands of his Father, or his Prince, and keeps the known laws of the land.

A good man may likewise know when he obeys God sincerely. Not but that men often deceive themselves with an opinion of their own sincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themselves, and use due care, there are very few cases (if any) wherein they may not know their own sincerity in any act of obedience to God: for what can a man know concerning himself, if not the reality of his own intentions? Should any man in earnest tell me, that he

doubted very much whether he had that friendship for me which he professed, I confess I should doubt of it too; because I should certainly conclude that he must know the sincerity of his own heart. And there is no question but whoever hath a desire to please another, knows he has it. Good and holy men in Scripture every where with great confidence appeal to God concerning the integrity of their hearts towards him. Job and David, Hezekiah and Nehemiah, do it in the Old Testament; and in the New, St. Paul, for himself and Timothy, makes this solemn profession of sincerity; *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and Godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world,* 2 Cor. i. 12. To say the truth, it would not be modesty, but impudence, in any man to declare that he suspects himself of hypocrisy; the good have always abhorred the thoughts of it. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and yet he could not bear to have his integrity questioned. It was a brave and generous speech of his, *till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me.*

III. Let us inquire whence it comes to pass, that notwithstanding this, so many persons are at such uncertainty about their spiritual condition. To clear this, we will consider three things.

1. The grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good

condition. I do not now mean the worst of men, but such as make some show and appearance of goodness. It is very unpleasing to fall under the censure of others, but most grievous to be self-condemned; and therefore it is no wonder we use all manner of shifts to avoid so great an inconvenience.—Some rely upon the profession of the Christian faith; this is so far from being an exemption from a good life, that it is the most solemn obligation to it. Dost thou believe the doctrine of the gospel? thou of all men art inexcusable, if thou allowest thyself in ungodliness and worldly lusts. Others trust to their external devotion; they frequent the church, they pray to God, and hear his word, and receive the blessed sacrament; but let us not deceive ourselves, *God is not mocked.* All this is so far from making amends for the wickedness of our lives, that, on the contrary, the wickedness of our lives spoils all the acceptance of our devotions. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law* (that is, from obeying it) *even his prayer shall be an abomination.*—Others, who are sensible they are very bad, depend very much upon their repentance, especially if they set solemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt but that a sincere repentance will make our condition good; but then no repentance can be sincere, which produceth not a real reformation in our

lives. It is well thou art in some measure se
sible of thy miscarriage, but thou art nev
safe till thou hast forsaken thy sins; thy co
dition towards God is not changed, till th
hast really altered the course of thy life.-
Others satisfy themselves with the exercise
some particular virtues; justice, liberality, a
charity. And is it not a thousand pities, th
thy life is not all of a piece! that thou shoul
lose the reward of what is so well done, out
thy fondness to any one vice or lust! that wh
thou art not far from the kingdom of God, i
lack of one or two things more thou shoul
fall short of it! hast thou ever heard what t
Scripture saith, that *he who offends in one po*
is a transgressor of the whole law? To make
good, all parts of goodness must concur; b
any one way of wickedness is sufficient to c
nominate us bad.—Lastly, Some who are ve
careful of their outward carriage, but yet a
conscious of great secret faults and vices, wh
they can find no comfort from the testimo
of their own consciences, are apt to comf
themselves in the good opinion which oth
have of them. But if we know ourselves to
bad, and *our own hearts condemn us*, it is not t
good opinion of others that will better our c
dition. They may have reason for their cl
rity, and yet thou none for thy confidenc

thyself, because nobody can know thee so well as thou mayest know thyself.

These, and such as these, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which Job elegantly compares to the spider's web, finely and artificially wrought, but miserably thin and weak. They are but pleasant dreams, which, whenever we are awakened to a serious consideration of our condition by the apprehensions of approaching death and judgment, will presently vanish; *what is the hope of the hypocrite*, says the same holy man, *when God taketh away his soul?*

2. We will consider, in the next place, the causeless doubts of men really good, concerning their bad condition: for as some are prone beyond all reason to delude themselves with vain hopes, so others are apt as unreasonably to torment themselves with groundless fears. Of these doubts there are several occasions.

1. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and that therefore they cannot be the *children of God*. This is so unreasonable, that if it were not a real cause of trouble to some persons, it would not deserve to be considered. For no man who sincerely endeavours to please God and keep his commandments, hath, from Scripture, the least ground to suspect any secret decree of God against *him, that* shall work his ruin. But whatever *the decrees* of God be concerning the eternal

state of men, since they are unknown to us, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no one has reason to think himself rejected of God either from eternity, or in time, who does not find the marks of reprobation in himself;—I mean, an evil heart and life. By this, indeed, he may know that he is out of God's favour for the present, but he has no reason to conclude from hence that God hath from all eternity, and for ever, cast him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords him the space and means for it, is a much plainer sign that he is willing and ready to have mercy on him, than any thing else can be that he hath utterly cast him off; and therefore for us to judge of our condition by the decrees of God which are hid from us, and not by his *word*, which is *near us and in our hearts*, is as if a sailor, wandering in the wide sea in a dark night, when the heaven is all clouded about him, should yet resolve to steer his course by the stars, which he can only guess at, and neglect the compass which is at hand, and would afford him a certain direction.

This therefore is to be rejected as a groundless imagination, and which ought to trouble nobody, because nobody can know any thing concerning it. Moses hath long since very well determined this matter; *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things*

which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law, Deut. xxix. 29.

2. Good men are conscious to themselves of many frailties and imperfections; and therefore they are afraid of their condition; but God considers the infirmities of our present state, and expects no other obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this state of imperfection is capable of; and, provided our sincere endeavours be to please him, and keep his commandments, the terms of the gospel are so merciful that our frailties shall not be imputed to us, so as to make us cease to be the *children of God*. And though we may be guilty of many errors which escape our observation; yet, in this case, God will accept of a general repentance, as he did from David, when he made that humble confession and prayer to him; *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins*, Psalm xix. 12. I speak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better; but to remove the groundless jealousies of men about their main state.

3. Good men are afraid their obedience is not sincere, because it proceeds many times from fear, and not always from pure love to God. To remove this doubt, let it be observed,

that in Scripture God proposes to men several motives to obedience; some proper to work upon their fear, as the threatenings of punishment; some upon their hope, as the promises of reward; others upon their love, as the mercies and forgiveness of God; from whence it is evident he intended they should all work upon us; and accordingly the Scripture gives us instances of the effects of each kind—*Noah moved with fear, obeyed God in preparing an ark:—Moses had respect unto the recompense of reward:—Mary Magdalen loved much.* It is not necessary to determine just how much influence each of these hath upon us; it is well if we be reclaimed by the joint force of all the considerations which God offers to us. Love is undoubtedly the noblest principle of obedience, but fear commonly takes the surest hold of us; and, in times of violent temptation, is perhaps the most powerful argument to keep even the best of men within the bounds of their duty.

4. Another cause of doubting in good men, is, from a sense of their imperfect performance of the duties of religion. They have many wandering thoughts in prayer and other exercises of devotion, and cannot keep their minds continually intent on what they are about. This *we should* strive against as much as we can; *but to* cure it wholly is impossible: and no *man ought* to question his sincerity, because he

cannot do that which it is impossible for men to do.

5. Another cause of these doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary assurance of their good condition; some particular revelation from God, and extraordinary impression upon their minds to that purpose. I cannot say what peculiar favour God may show to some, but I know no such thing, nor ever yet met with any wise and good man that affirmed it of himself; and I fear that it is, in most of those who pretend to it, either mere fancy or gross delusion.

6. As for the case of melancholy, it is not a reasonable case, and therefore does not fall under any certain directions. They who are under the power of it are seldom fit to take the counsel, which alone is fit to be given them; and that is, not to believe themselves concerning themselves, but to trust the judgment of others rather than their own apprehensions; this cause of doubting is much to be pitied, but hard to be removed. One may happen to say something to hit the humour of a melancholy man, and satisfy him for the present; but reason must signify little to those persons, the nature of whose distemper it is to turn every thing that can be said for their comfort into objections against themselves.

Thirdly, Besides those who mistake their *condition*, either by presuming it to be better,

or fearing it to be worse than it really is; there are likewise others, who upon good grounds are doubtful of their condition, and have reason to be afraid of it; those, I mean, who have some beginnings of goodness, which yet are very imperfect. They have pious inclinations and resolutions, and have made some fair attempts towards goodness; they have begun to refrain from sin, and to resist the occasions and temptations of it; but are often mastered by their old lusts, and carried off from their best resolutions; upon a little consideration they repent and recover themselves again, and after a while are again entangled and overcome. Now the case of these persons is really doubtful; and the proper direction to be given them, is by all means to fortify their good resolutions, to be more watchful over themselves, to strive against sin, and to resist it with all their might. And according to their success in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day become more manifest; for *the path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.*

I shall only make two or three inferences from what has been said, and so conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of sins of omission as well as commission; *whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* The *mere* neglect of any of the great duties of religion, of piety towards God, or of kindness

and charity to men, though we be free from the commission of great sins, is enough to cast us out of the favour of God, and to shut us for ever out of his kingdom; *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not; therefore depart, ye cursed.*

2. It is evident, that nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any course of sin, and yet pretend to be the children of God, and hope for eternal life. The children of God will do the works of God; and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter, will endeavour to be like him here; *every man that hath this hope in him, purifies himself, even as he is pure.*

3. You see the great mark of a man's good or bad condition; *whosoever doth righteousness is of God, and whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* Here is a plain and sensible evidence, by which every man may know his own condition; and then, according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haste out of it. And we need not ascend into heaven, nor go down into the deep, to search out the secret counsels and decrees of God; there needs no anxious inquiry, whether we be of the number of God's elect. If we daily mortify our lusts, and grow in goodness, and take care to add to our faith and knowledge, temperance, patience, and charity, and all other Christian graces and virtues, we certainly take

the best course in the world to *make our calling and election sure.* Without this it is impossible that we should have any well-grounded assurance of our good condition. This one mark of *doing righteousness* is that into which all other signs and characters given in Scripture of a good man, are finally resolved. *It is hereby that we know that we know God, if we keep his commandments:—This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments:—The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance shall behold the upright:--Whosoever is born of God sinneth not:—As many as have the Spirit of God are led by the Spirit, and by the Spirit mortify the deeds of the flesh:—They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lusts thereof:—Without holiness no man shall see the Lord; but if we have our fruit unto holiness, the end will be everlasting life.* So that you see at last the Scripture brings all to one mark, holiness and obedience to the laws of God, or a vicious and wicked life. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.*

Let us then deal impartially with ourselves, and bring our lives and actions to this trial; and never be at rest till we have made a deliberate judgment whether we be *the children of God* or not. And if upon a full and fair examination, our consciences give us this

testimony, that by the grace of God we have *denied ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and have *lived soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*, we may take joy and comfort in it; for *if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* But if, upon the trial of our ways, our case appear clearly to be otherwise, or if we have just cause to doubt of it, let as not venture to continue one moment longer in so uncertain and dangerous a condition. If we desire to know the way of peace, the Scripture hath set it plainly before us: *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* Though our case be very bad, yet it is not desperate, *this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;* and he is still willing to save us, if we be but willing to leave our sins, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* We, who have ventured so long upon the brink of ruin, may *yet, if not* wanting to ourselves, by the infinite *mercies of* God, and by the power of his

grace, be rescued from the miserable sla
of the devil and our lusts, *into the glo*
liberty of the sons of God.

Thus I have endeavoured, with all the pl
ness I could, to represent every man to him
and to let him clearly see how the case of
soul and of his eternal happiness stands. A
I verily believe, that what I have said is
truth of God, to which we ought all gl
to render up ourselves: for *great is truth,*
mighty above all things; she is faithful
impartial in her counsels; and though sh
not always welcome, yet it is always wis
hearken to her: *with her is no excepting of*
sons, and in her judgment there is no unrig
ousness.

I will conclude all with that excellent
vice of a heathen emperor, (Antoninus) M
it no longer a matter of dispute what are
marks and signs of a good man, but im
diately set about it, and endeavour to bec
one.

SERMON XII.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

MATT. XXV. 1, 2, &c.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, &c.

MY design at present is to make such observations upon this parable, as seem most naturally to spring from it; and then apply it to ourselves.

First, I observe how very common it is for men to neglect this great concern of their souls, the due preparation for another world; and how willing they are to deceive themselves herein, and to depend upon any thing else, how unreasonable soever, rather than endeavour to be really good, and fit for heaven. This is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish virgins, who had provided no supply of oil in their vessels, and when the Bridegroom was coming would have furnished themselves by borrowing or buying of others.

Secondly, I observe, that even the better sort of Christians are not careful, as the

ought, to prepare themselves for death and judgment. *Whilst the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept*, even the wise virgins as well as the foolish.

Thirdly, I observe further, how little is to be done by us to any good purpose, in this great work of preparation, when it is put off to the last. Thus, what a sad confusion the foolish were in, when surprised by the coming of the Bridegroom; and how ineffectual all that they could do at that time proved to be, the parable represents to us at large, ver. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Fourthly, I observe, that no man can do more than is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another world.

First, I observe, not from any particular circumstance, but from the main design of this parable, how very apt many Christians are to neglect this great concern of their souls, the due preparation for another world; and how willing they are to deceive themselves herein, and to depend upon any thing else, how unreasonable soever, rather than upon the pains they take to be really good and fit for heaven: this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish virgins, *who had* provided no supply of oil in their *vessels*, and when the Bridegroom was coming, *would have* furnished themselves by borrowing or buying of others. They contented

themselves with having their lamps lighted at their first setting out to meet the Bridegroom, that is, with their being admitted into the profession of Christianity by baptism, but either were not stedfast in this profession, or were not careful to adorn it with the graces and virtues of a good life.

And the true reason why men are so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and are so hardly brought to those things wherein religion chiefly consists, I mean, the fruits of the spirit, and the practice of real goodness, is, because they are extremely desirous to reconcile, if it were possible, the hopes of eternal happiness in another world, with a liberty to live as they please in this. They are loath to be at the trouble of mortifying their lusts, governing their passions, bridling their tongues, and practising all those duties which are comprehended in those two great commandments of the love of God, and of our neighbour. They would fain gain the favour of God, and make their calling and election sure by some easier way than by giving all diligence to add to their faith and knowledge, the graces and virtues of a good life.

For the plain truth is, men had rather that religion should be any thing else than what indeed it is—the crossing their vicious inclinations—the curing their evil and corrupt affections—the government of their unruly ap

petites and passions—their sincere endeavour, and the constant practice of holiness and virtue in their lives; and therefore they had much rather have something that might palliate and excuse their evil inclinations and practices, than be obliged to retrench and renounce them: and rather than amend their lives, they would make compensation to Almighty God in some other way.

This hath been the folly of mankind in all ages to defeat the great end of religion, by substituting something else in the place of it, which, as they think, may serve the turn as well; having the appearance of as much devotion and respect towards God, and really costing them more money and pains, than that which he requires of them.

From this false principle, religion hath ever been apt to degenerate, both among Jews and Christians, into external and little observances; into a great zeal for lesser things, with a total neglect of weightier; in a word, into infinite superstitions, and an arrogant conceit of the extraordinary righteousness and merit of these things.

And it is no wonder that such easy ways of religion are very grateful to the corrupt nature of man. The great difficulty is, to believe that things so apparently absurd can be true, and to persuade ourselves that we can impose upon God by such pretences of service and

obedience, as no wise prince or father upon earth is to be deluded withal by his subjects or children. We ought to have worthier thoughts of God, and to consider that he should be served by his creatures in his own way, and will make them happy upon his own terms; and that obedience to what he commands is better and more acceptable to him than any other sacrifice that we can offer; and likewise that as he is infinitely wise and good, the laws which he hath given us to live by, are therefore much more likely to bring us to happiness than any inventions or devices of our own.

Secondly, I observe, that even the better and more considerate sort of Christians are not so careful as they ought, to prepare themselves for death and judgment; *Whilst the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.* Even the disciples of our Saviour, whilst he was yet personally present with them, and after a particular charge given them from his own mouth, *watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation;* yet did not keep that guard upon themselves as to *watch with him one hour. In many things,* says St. James, *we offend all;* even the best of us: and who is there that doth not, some time or other remit of his vigilancy and care, so as to lie open to temptation? But then the difference between the wise and foolish virgins was this, that though they both

slept, yet the wise did not let their lamps go out; they never quitted their profession, nor did they extinguish it by a bad life; and though, when the Bridegroom came suddenly upon them, they were not so actually prepared to meet him by a continual vigilancy; yet they were habitually prepared by the good disposition of their minds, and the general course of a holy life. Their lamps might burn dim for want of constant trimming, but they had oil in their vessels to supply their lamps, which the foolish virgins had taken no care to provide. But surely the greatest wisdom is to maintain a continual watchfulness, that so we may not be surprised by the coming of the Bridegroom, and be in confusion when death or judgment shall overtake us. And *blessed are those servants*, and *wise* indeed, whose lamps always burn bright, and whom the Bridegroom, when *he comes, shall find watching*, and in a fit posture and preparation to meet him.

Thirdly, I observe likewise how little is to be done by us to any good purpose, in this great work of preparation, when it is put off to the last. The parable represents to us at large what a sad confusion the foolish virgins were in at the sudden coming of the Bridegroom, when they found themselves altogether unprovided of that which was necessary to trim their lamps, and to put them in

a posture to meet the Bridegroom; when they wanted what was necessary at that very instant, but could not be provided in an instant: *At midnight there was a cry made, Behold! the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps*, that is, went about it as well as they could; *and the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.*

At midnight there was a cry made; that is, at the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other; when they were fast asleep, and suddenly awakened in great terror; when the summons was so very short, that they had neither leisure to consider what was fit to be done, nor time to do it in.

And such is the case of those who put off their repentance and preparation for another world, till they are surprised by death, or judgment. The parable indeed seems more particularly to point at our *Lord's coming to judgment;* but the case is much the same as to those who are surprised by sudden death; such as gives them but little, or not sufficient time for so great a work; because such as death leaves them, judgment will certainly find them.

And what a miserable confusion must they be in, who are thus surprised either by the *one or the* other? How unfit should we be, *if the* general judgment of the world should

suddenly come upon us, to meet that *great Judge* at *his coming*, if we have made no preparation for it before that time? What shall we then be able to do in that great and universal consternation? when the *Son of Man shall appear in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory;* when *the sun shall be darkened and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shall be shaken;* when all nature shall feel such violent convulsions; when the *heavens shall be shrivelled up as a scroll when it is rolled together,* and the earth shall be tossed from its centre, *and every mountain and island shall be removed?* What thoughts can the wisest men then have about them? or, if they could have any, what time will there then be to put them in execution? When they *shall see the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth, lifting up his hand to heaven, and declaring by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer;* Rev. x. 5, 6. As this dreadful day is described in the Revelations (Chap. vi. 15.) where sinners are represented at the appearance of this great judge, not as flying to God in hopes of mercy, but as flying from him in utter despair. *The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the mighty men, and the rich men, and the great captains, hid themselves* in the dens and in *the rocks of the earth, and said* to the mountains and rocks, *Fall on us, and hide us from* the face of him that

sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? The boldest sinners that ever were upon the earth, shall then flee from the face of him, whom they have so often blasphemed and denied; and shall so far despair of finding mercy with him in that day, that they shall address themselves to the *mountains* and *rocks* as being more exorable than *he, to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. From the wrath of the Lamb,* to signify unto us, that nothing is more terrible than meekness and patience, when they are thoroughly provoked and turned into fury.

In such dreadful confusion shall all impenitent sinners be, when they shall be surprised by that *great and terrible day of the Lord:* and the case of a dying sinner, who would take no care in the time of his life and health to make preparation for another world, is not much more comfortable: for, alas! how little is it that a sick and dying man can do in the midst of so much pain and weakness of body, and of such confusion and amazement of mind! With what heart can he set about so great a work, for which there is so little time? With what face can he apply himself to God in this extremity, whom he hath so disdainfully neglected all the days of his life? And how can he have the confidence to hope that God wi

hear his cries, and regard his tears, forced from him in this day of his necessity, when he is conscious to himself that in that long day of God's grace and patience, he turned a deaf ear to all his merciful invitations, and *rejected the counsel of God against himself?* In a word, how can he who *would not know, in that his day, the things which belonged to his peace*, expect any other but that they should now *be for ever hid from his eyes*, which are ready to be closed in utter darkness.

I will not pronounce any thing concerning the impossibility of a death-bed repentance: I am sure it is very difficult, and I believe very rare. We have but one example, that I know of, in the whole Bible, of the repentance of a dying sinner; I mean, that of the penitent thief upon the cross: and the circumstances of his case are so peculiar and extraordinary, that I cannot see that it affords any ground of hope to men in ordinary cases.

And the parable in the text is so far from giving any encouragement to a death-bed repentance and preparation, that it rather represents their case as desperate, who put off their preparation to that time. How ineffectual every thing proved that the *foolish virgins could do, is* set forth at large in the parable: *they wanted* oil, but could then neither borrow *nor buy it.* First they apply themselves to *the wise virgins* for a share in the overplus of

their graces and virtues; *the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; but the wise answered, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And whilst they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. And afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; but he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

You see how little, or rather no encouragement at all, there is in this parable, for those who have delayed their preparation for another world till they be overtaken by death or judgment, to hope, by any thing that they can then do, by any importunity which they can then use, to gain admission into heaven. Let those consider this with fear and trembling, who forget God, and neglect religion all their lifetime, and yet feed themselves with vain hopes of being admitted into heaven at last. Our blessed Saviour, indeed, merited for us the reward of eternal life, upon the condition of faith, repentance, and obedience; but the infinite merit of his obedience and sufferings will be of no advantage to us, if we ourselves be not really and inherently righteous. So St. John tells us, *Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.*

Fourthly, I observe, that no man can do

more than is his duty to do by way o
paration for another world. For whe
foolish virgins would have begged of th
some oil for their lamps, the *wise* ans
Not so, lest there be not enough for us an
It was only the *foolish virgins*, who, i
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But the *wise* knew of none they had to sp
they supposed all that they had done, or co
possibly do, to be little enough to qualify th
for the glorious reward of eternal life: and
this point they had been plainly instructed
the Bridegroom himself: *But ye, when ye h*
done all, say, we are unprofitable servants,
have done nothing but what was our duty to d

The inference from all this shall be the
plication which our Saviour makes of
parable: *Watch therefore, for ye know neit*
the day nor the hour wherein the Son of M
cometh; as if he had said, the design of
parable is to instruct us, that we ought to
continually vigilant, and always upon
guard, and in a constant readiness and
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By this means, when we are called to *meet the Bridegroom*, we shall not be put to those miserable shifts that the *foolish virgins* were driven to; which will all fail us when we come to depend upon them. And though the dying man may possibly support himself with these false comforts for a little while, yet when the short delusion is over, which will be as soon as ever he has stepped into the other world, he will to his everlasting confusion and trouble find, that he *shall never see the kingdom of God.*

Lastly, We should take great care that we do not extinguish our lamps, by quitting the profession of our holy religion upon any temptation of advantage, or for fear of any loss or suffering whatsoever. This trial will call for all our faith and patience, all our courage and constancy: here we had need to *gird up the loins of our minds*, to summon all our forces, and *to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand fast in an evil day, and when we have done all to stand.*

And now, my brethren, to use the words of St. Peter, *I testify unto you, that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand*: the Protestant reformed religion, which we in this nation profess, is the very gospel of Christ, the true ancient Christianity.

And if we have any regard for our religion, let us resolve to practise its rules, and thereby show our love to it; as our Saviour would hav

us; and to testify our love to it, in the same way that our Saviour would have us show our love to him, *by keeping his commandments.*

I will conclude all with the Apostle's exhortation: *only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ;* that is, chiefly and above all, take care to lead lives suitable to the Christian religion.

Now unto him that is able to establish you in the gospel, and to keep you from falling; and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy: to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever.

SERMON XIII.

THE CARE OF OUR SOULS, THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

LUKE X. 42.

But one thing is needful.

FROM these words the observation I shall make is this, that the care of religion and of our souls is the *one thing* necessary, and what every man is concerned in the first place, and above all other things to regard. And in *speaking* to this weighty argument, I shall endeavour,

I. To show wherein the care of religion and of our souls consists.

II. To convince men of the necessity of taking this care.

1. I shall show wherein the care of religion and of our souls consists.

And this it does, first, in the distinct knowledge, and in the firm belief of those things which are necessary to be known and believed by us, in order to our eternal salvation. For, knowledge of the necessary principles and duties of religion is the foundation of all good practice, which is the life of religion. And this knowledge our blessed Saviour calls *eternal life*, because it is so fundamentally necessary to attain it. *This is life eternal*, says he, *to know thee the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ;* that is, to be rightly instructed with regard to the *only true God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.* Under which two general heads are comprehended all the necessary principles of natural, and of the Christian religion. And the language of the apostle is, *Without faith it is impossible, &c.*

2. The due care of our souls consists in the frequent examination of our lives, and in a sincere repentance for all our errors and miscarriages; in a more particular and deep humiliation and repentance for deliberate and wilful sins, so far as we can call them to remembrance; and in a general repentance for

sins of ignorance, infirmity, and surprise. In the exercise whereof we are always to remember, that true repentance doth not consist only in an humble confession of our sins to God, and a hearty trouble for them; but chiefly in the stedfast resolution of a better life, and in actual reformation and amendment.

Hereby it is that we are put into a safe condition: but if we retain the love and practice of any known sin, or if after our good resolutions, we return to an evil course; this is a clear evidence, either that our repentance was not sincere at first, or that we are relapsed into our former state; and then our souls are still in danger of being lost, and will continue in that dangerous state, till we have made good our repentance in the following course of our lives.

3. The due care of our souls consists in the constant exercise of piety and devotion; by fervent prayer to God, and by hearing and reading his word with reverence and godly fear; by frequenting his public worship, and demeaning ourselves in it with that solemnity and seriousness which becomes the presence and service of the great and glorious majesty of God, who observes our behaviour, and sees into our hearts; and by receiving the blessed sacrament, as often as we have opportunity, with due preparation and devotion.

For these are not only outward testimonie

of our inward piety, but they are means likewise appointed by God to improve and confirm us in holiness and goodness. And whoever neglects these duties of religion, or performs them in a slight and superficial manner, plainly shows that he has neither a due sense of God, nor care of himself. For in vain do we pretend that we in earnest design the end, when we neglect the best means to attain it.

4. The due care of our souls consists also in avoiding those things which are pernicious to our salvation. Such in general is the practice of any known sin. By this, we, as it were, run upon the sword's point, and endanger our salvation, as much as a deep wound in our body would do our life: and though such a wound may perhaps be cured afterwards by repentance, yet no man that commits any wilful sin knows the dismal consequence of it; for, upon such a provocation, God may leave the sinner to himself, withdraw his grace from him, and give him up to a hard and impenitent heart, to proceed from evil to worse, and from one wickedness to another, till he be finally ruined. So dangerous a thing it is knowingly to offend God.

More particularly, an inordinate love of the world is very pernicious to the souls of men; because it fills our mind with earthly cares, tempts us to forsake God and religion when our worldly interests come in competitio

with them; and betrays us to fraud, falsehood, injustice, and many other hurtful lusts, which throw the soul into perdition.

5. The due care of our souls consists in the even and constant practice of the several graces and virtues of a good life; or, as the apostle expresseth it, *in exercising ourselves always to have a conscience void of offence towards God and men.* For religion is best seen in an equal and uniform regard to every part of our duty; not only in serving God devoutly, but in demeaning ourselves peaceably, justly, kindly, and charitably towards all men; not only in restraining ourselves from the outward act of sin, but in mortifying the inward inclination to it; in subduing our lusts, governing our passions, and bridling our tongues. As he that would have prudent care of his health and life must not only guard against the chief and common diseases which are incident to men, and take care to prevent them; but must likewise be careful to preserve himself from those which are esteemed less dangerous, but yet sometimes prove mortal; must not only endeavour to secure his head and heart from being wounded, but must have a tender care of every part: in like manner, the care of our souls consists in an universal regard to our duty; but more especially to those parts of it wherein religion chiefly consists as piety towards God, temperance and ch

tity in regard to ourselves, charity to the poor; truth, justice, goodness, and ness towards all men. But then no other and virtue, though of an inferior rank, to be neglected by us.

And thus I have endeavoured, as plai I could, to declare in what instances th care of religion and our souls chiefly co And I would not have any of us think this is an easy business, and requires but time to do it in, and that a small deg diligence will serve for this purpose. To ter and root out the inveterate habits o to bring our passions under the governm our reason, and to attain to a good deg every Christian grace and virtue; that *hope*, and *charity; humility, meekness*, an *tience*, may all *have their perfect work*; that, as St. James says, we *may be perfe entire, wanting nothing;* nothing that be to the perfection of a good man, and good Christian; this, whenever we co make the trial, we shall find to be a grea a long work.

Some indeed would make religion to c only in believing what Christ hath dor us, and relying confidently upon it; wh *so far* from being the true notion of Chr *faith, that,* if I be not mistaken, it i *very definition* of presumption. For th *teacheth* us, that unless our *faith* work

rity, and *purify our hearts*, it is but a *dead faith*, and will in no wise avail to our salvation. And our blessed Saviour, the *great author and finisher of our faith*, hath no where said, that faith separated from obedience and a good life will save any man; but hath said very much to the contrary, and that very plainly: for he promiseth blessedness to none but them who live in the practice of those Christian graces and virtues, which are particularly mentioned in his excellent sermon upon the mount; of humility, repentance, meekness, righteousness, mercifulness, purity, peaceableness, and patience under persecution and sufferings for righteousness sake. And afterwards, in the same sermon, *Not every one*, saith he, *that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* In a word, this is the perpetual tenor of the Bible, from the beginning of it to the end. *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* And again, *Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.* And in the gospel, when the young man came to be instructed by our Saviour, *what good thing he should do that he might inherit eternal life*, our Lord gives him this short and plain advice. *If thou wilt enter into life,*

keep the commandments. And in the very last chapter of the Bible we find this solemn declaration, *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city;* that is, into heaven; which the apostle to the Hebrews calls the *city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* So vain and groundless is the imagination of those who trust to be saved by an idle and ineffectual faith, without holiness and obedience of life.

II. I proceed now in the second place to convince men of the necessity of minding religion, and their souls. And to do this, I shall briefly show, 1. That religion is a certain way to happiness: 2. That it is certain there is no other way but this; and 3. That if we neglect religion, we shall be extremely and for ever miserable.

1. Religion is a certain way to happiness. This God hath expressly declared. *He that cannot lie* hath promised *eternal life to them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.* All the happiness of which the nature of man is capable is promised to us upon the terms of religion; upon our denying *ungodliness and worldly lusts, and* living soberly, righteously, and *godly in the world.* A mighty reward for a little service! an eternity of happiness, of joy

unspeakable and full of glory, for the diligence and industry of a few days! a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as our souls!

2. It is certain that there is no other way to happiness but by religion. God hath promised it to us upon these and no other terms; he hath said, *That if we live after the flesh, we shall die; but if by the spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live;* that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord;* and that he who lives in the habitual practice of any vice, of *covetousness, adultery, malice, or revenge, shall not enter into the kingdom of God.*

And if God had not said it in his word, yet the nature of the thing plainly declares it. For religion is not only a condition of our happiness, but a necessary qualification for it. We must be like God, in the temper of our minds, before we can find any happiness in the enjoyment of him. We must be purged from our lusts, and from those devilish passions of malice, envy, and revenge, before we can be fit company for our heavenly father, and meet to dwell with him, *who is love, and dwells in love.*

3. If we neglect religion, we shall certainly be extremely and for ever miserable. The word of truth hath said it, that indignation and *wrath, tribulation and anguish,* shall be upon *every soul of man that doeth evil.* Nay, if G

should inflict no positive torment upon sinners, yet they would be their own tormentors. The guilt of that wicked life which they had led, and the stings of their own consciences must necessarily make them miserable, whenever their thoughts are let loose upon them; as they will certainly be in the other world, when they shall have nothing either of pleasure or business to divert them. So that if we be concerned, either to be happy hereafter, or to avoid those miseries which are great and dreadful beyond all imagination, it will be necessary for us to mind religion; without which we can neither attain that happiness, nor escape those miseries.

All that remains is to persuade men seriously to mind this *one thing* necessary. And to this end, I shall apply myself, first, to those who are remiss in a matter of so great concern; and then to those who are grossly careless, and mind it not at all.

First, To those who are remiss; who mind religion in some degree, but not so heartily and vigorously as a matter of such infinite consequence requires.

And here I fear the best are defective; and so much the more to be blamed, by how much they are more convinced than others of the necessity of a religious and holy life, and that without this no man shall ever be admitted into the mansions of the blessed: they believe,

likewise, that according to the degree of every man's holiness and virtue, will be that of his happiness; that *he that sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly, and he that sows plentifully shall reap plentifully*; and that the measure of every man's reward shall be according to his improvement of the talents that were committed to him.

But how little do any live under the power of these convictions? and notwithstanding we are allured by the most glorious promises and hopes, awed by the greatest fears, and urged by the most forcible argument, the evident necessity of the thing; yet how faintly do we all run the race that is set before us! How easily are we stopped or diverted in our Christian course, by very little temptations! How cold, how careless, and how inconstant are we, generally in the exercises of piety, and how defective in every part of our duty? Did we act as men do in matters of much less moment, we could not be so indifferent about a thing so necessary; we could not be so careless in a matter of life and death, and upon which all eternity depends.

Let us then shake off this sloth and security; and when we are immersed in the cares and business of this life, and *troubled about many things*, let this thought often come into our minds, that there is *one* thing needful, and

which deserves above all other things to be regarded by us.

Secondly, I shall apply my discourse to those who are grossly careless of this *one thing necessary*, and seem not to mind it at all; who go on securely in an evil course, as if they had no souls, or no concern for them. I may say to these, as the master of the ship did to Jonah, *What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon thy God.* When our souls are every moment in danger of sinking, it is high time for us to awake out of sleep, to ply every oar, and to use all possible care and industry to save them.

We are sensible enough of the force of this argument of necessity in cases that concern this life; and careful to provide against the temporal evils of poverty and disgrace, of pain and suffering; but the great necessity of all is, to provide for eternity, to secure everlasting happiness, and to prevent endless and insupportable misery. This, this is the *one thing necessary*, and to this we ought to apply all our endeavours.

If we would fairly compare the necessity of things, and weigh the concerns of this life and the other in a just balance, we should be ashamed to misplace our diligence as we do; to bestow our best thoughts and time about these vain and perishing things, and to take

no care about *that better part which cannot be taken from us.* Fond and vain men that we are, who are so solicitous how we shall pass a few days in this world, but matter not what shall become of us for ever.

But as careless as we now are about these things, the hour will come when we shall sadly lay them to heart. When we come to lie upon a death-bed, if God shall be pleased to grant us time and reason to recollect ourselves, we shall then be convinced how great a necessity there was of minding our souls, and of the prodigious folly of neglecting them till we are ready to despair of saving them.

Blessed be God, this is not yet our case, though we know not how soon it may be. Let us then be wise and consider these things in time, lest death and despair should overtake and oppress us at once.

You that are young, be pleased to consider that this is the best opportunity of your lives to do this work. You are now most capable of the best impressions, before the habits of vice have taken deep root, and your hearts *be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin:* this *is the acceptable time, this is the day of salvation.*

There is likewise a very weighty consideration to be urged upon those that are old, *that this is* their last opportunity, and therefore they should improve it with all their

might; for it will soon be past, never to be recalled.

It is but a little while before we shall all certainly be convinced, that the best thing we could have done in this world was to prepare for another. Could I represent that invisible world, you would all readily assent to this counsel and would be glad to follow it. Do but then open your eyes, and look a little before you to the things which are not far off from any of us, and to many of us may perhaps be much nearer than we are aware; let us but judge of things now, as we shall shortly judge of them; and let us live now, as after a few days we shall every one of us wish we had lived; and be as serious, as if we were ready to enter upon that change which death will quickly make in all of us. Strange stupidity of men! that a change so certain, so great, so near, should affect us so coldly, and be so little considered and provided for by us! That the things of time should move us so much, and the things of eternity so little! What will we do when this change comes, if we have made no preparation for it!

Happy that man, who in the days of his health, hath retired from the noise and tumult of this world, and made that careful preparation for death and a better life, which will enable him to bear the thoughts and approaches of his great change without amazement; and to

have a mind almost equally poized between that strong inclination of nature, which makes us desirous to live, and that wiser dictate of reason and religion, which should make us willing to die whenever God thinks fit.

To this end we should resolutely disentangle ourselves from worldly cares and incumbrances; at least so far as to have competent leisure to attend this great concern, and to prepare our souls for another world; that when sickness and death shall come, we may not act our last part indecently and confusedly; and have a great deal of work to do, when we shall want both time and all other advantages to do it in.

To conclude: This care of religion and our souls is a thing so necessary, that in comparison of it we are to neglect the very necessaries of life. So our Lord teacheth us, *Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.* The calls of God and religion are so very pressing, that they admit of no delay. This our Saviour signifies to us by denying the disciple, whom he had called to follow him, leave to bury his father: *Let the dead,* says he, *bury their dead, but do thou follow me.*

There is *one thing needful*, and that is the *business of* religion, and the care of our im-

mortal souls, which, whatever we negl
should be seriously regarded by every
of us. O that there were such a heart in
O that we were wise, that we understood
that we would consider our latter end! W
God grant we may all do, in this our day,
his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ; to wh
with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be
honour and glory, now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XIV.

THAT GOD IS THE ONLY HAPPINESS OF MA

PSALM lxxiii. 25.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? And the
none upon earth that I desire besides thee

THE design of this Psalm is to vindicate
goodness and justness of the Divine Provide
notwithstanding the prosperous state of
wicked, and the afflicted condition of
righteous many times in this world. In
first place, the Psalmist lays it down
most certain truth, that God is good to
men: *Of a truth God is good to Israel, to*
as are of a clean heart: and he then proc
to examine the force of this objection,
the wicked are often prosperous, and

men exposed to great calamities in this life; which, after a full debate, he resolves into the unsearchable wisdom of Divine Providence; being satisfied, that whenever the secret design thereof should be unfolded, whether in this world or the other, it would appear, That neither are bad men so happy, nor good men so miserable, as at present they seem to be.

He considers all objections of this nature against Providence as springing from our ignorance, and imperfect view of things; whereas if we saw the whole design from beginning to end, it would appear to be very reasonable and regular. In regard to himself, he tells us, that he had great reason to acknowledge God's tender care over him in particular, and that he could find no security or comfort but in God alone: *Nevertheless I am continually with thee, thou hast holden me by thy right hand: thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.* As if he had said, I am sensible of thy constant presence with me, and care of me; and entirely depend upon thy guidance and direction, not doubting but that my present troubles and afflictions will have a happy and glorious issue.

At last he breaks out into a kind of triumph for the mighty consolation which he found in the firm belief of the Providence of God, as the *great* stay and support of his soul, in the worst *condition* that could befall him; Whom have

in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. This then is the plain meaning of the text, that nothing but God can make man happy.

The nature of man, considered by itself, is plainly insufficient for its own happiness; so that we must necessarily look abroad, and seek for it somewhere else: and who can show us that good which is equal to all the wants and necessities, all the capacities and desires, all the fears and hopes of human nature? Whatsoever can answer all these, must have the following properties:

I. It must be an all-sufficient good.

II. It must be perfect goodness.

III. It must be firm and unchangeable in itself.

IV. It must be such a good as none can take away from us.

V. It must be eternal.

VI. It must be able to support us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life.

VII. It must be such a good as can give perfect tranquillity to our minds.

Nothing that is short of all this can make us happy: and no creature, no, not the whole creation, can pretend to be all this to us. All these properties meet only in God, who is the perfect and supreme good, as I shall endeavour in the following discourse more particularly to

show; and, consequently, That God is the only happiness of man.

I. God is an all-sufficient good. And this imports two things; wisdom to design our happiness, and power to effect it; and both these, in the highest and most eminent degree, are in God. He is infinitely wise to design our happiness, because he knows what happiness is, and how to frame us so as to be capable of the happiness he designs for us; and how to order and dispose all other things so that they shall be no hindrance to it.

He knows all our wants, and how to supply them; all our hopes and desires, and how to satisfy them: he foresees all the dangers and evils which threaten us, and knows how to prevent or divert them, if he thinks fit; or if he permit them to come, how to support us under them, to deliver us out of them, or to turn them to our greater benefit in the last result of things.

His wisdom cannot be surprised by any accident. The wisdom of men is short and imperfect, and liable to innumerable mistakes; but the wisdom of God, being founded upon infinite knowledge, is thereby secured against all possibility of error. God perfectly knows the natures and powers of all his creatures, and therefore can never be mistaken in the use and application of them to any of his purposes. So that none of his designs of love and mercy to the sons of men can miscarry

And as he is perfectly wise to design our happiness, so is he infinitely powerful to effect it. We may understand many times what would conduce to our happiness, but may not be able to compass it; but nothing is out of the reach of Omnipotency. Many things are impossible with us, but *with God all things are possible:* he is the fountain of all power, from whom it is derived, upon whom it depends, and to whom it is perfectly subject.

If therefore God be on our side, who can be against us? he can give us all good things, and deliver us from all evil; *for his is the kingdom and the glorious power.* Though all creatures should fail us, we may rely upon the all-sufficiency of God for our support; and may say with the prophet, *Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine; though the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls; yet would I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.*

II. As God is an all-sufficient good, so he is perfect goodness. He is willing to communicate happiness to us, and to employ his power and wisdom for our good. He made us that he might make us happy; and nothing can hinder us from being so but ourselves. Such is his goodness, that he *would have all men to be saved, and* to come to the knowledge of *the truth:* and when we have provoked him

by our sins, *he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:* for *he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live.* So that if any of us be miserable, it is our own choice; if we perish, our destruction is of ourselves. God designed us for happiness at first, and to that end hath endowed us with powers and faculties whereby we are capable of knowing, loving, obeying, and enjoying him the chief good. And when we were miserably hurt by the wilful transgression and disobedience of our first parents, God of his infinite mercy was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of happiness, by sending his only Son to suffer in our nature, and in our stead; and thereby to become a *propitiation for thesins of the whole world,* and *the author of eternal salvation to them that believe and obey him.* And he hath likewise promised to give us his Holy Spirit to enable us to that faith and obedience which the gospel requires of us, as the necessary conditions of our salvation.

III. God is also a firm and unchangeable good. Notwithstanding his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, we might be miserable if God were mutable: for that cannot be a happiness which depends upon uncertainties; and perhaps one of the greatest aggravations of misery is to fall from happiness; to have been once happy, and afterwards to cease to

be so. And that might be the case, if the cause of our happiness could alter: but the divine nature is not subject to any change. As he is the *Father of light*, and the *author of every good and perfect gift*; so *with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

IV. God is such a good as none can take away from us. If the things of this world were unchangeable in their nature, yet they cannot make us happy; because we may be deprived of them by fraud, or by violence. But God cannot be taken from us: nothing but our sins can part God and us. *Who shall separate us*, saith the apostle, *from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* We may be stripped of all our worldly comforts and enjoyments by the fraud or violence of men, but none of all these can separate us from God. If we be careful to avoid sin, nothing can deprive us of him: the aids and influences of his grace none can intercept or hinder; the joys and comforts of his Holy Spirit none can take from us. All other things may forsake us: we may be debarred of our best friends, and banished from all our acquaintance; but men can send us no where from the presence of God: our communication with heaven cannot be prevented: our prayers and our souls will always find the way thither, from the utmost parts of the earth.

V. God is an eternal good: and nothing but what is so can make us happy. Man having an immortal spirit, and being designed for an endless duration, must have a happiness proportionable; and therefore nothing in this world can make us happy, because we shall remain after it: *but God is from everlasting to everlasting: he is the same, and his years fail not.*

VI. God is able to support us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life. Outward afflictions may hurt the body, but they cannot reach the soul; and so long as that remains unwounded, the *spirit of a man may bear his infirmities.* God is intimate to our souls, and hath secret ways whereby to convey the comforts of his Holy Spirit into our hearts under the sharpest sufferings: he can enable us by his grace to *possess our souls in patience,* when there is nothing but trouble about us: when we are persecuted, afflicted, and tormented, he can give us that stedfast assurance of a future blessedness, as shall quite extinguish all sense of present evils. How did many of the Christian martyrs, in the midst of their torments, and under the very pangs of death, *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

There are none of us but may happen to fall into such circumstances of danger, and of bodily pains and sufferings, as to have no

hopes of relief, but from God; none to trust to, but him only: and in the greatest evils that can befall us, he is a sure sanctuary. *When our heart fails, and our strength fails, God is the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever.*

Now what would any of us do in such a case, if it were not for God? Human nature is liable to desperate straits; and he is not happy, who is not provided against the worst. It is sad to be reduced to such a condition as to be destitute of all comfort and hope; and yet men may be brought to that distress, that if it were not for God, they would not know which way to turn themselves, or how to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable consideration.

All men naturally resort to God in extremity; even the most profane. But *God hath no pleasure in fools;* in those who neglect him in their prosperity; but when the evil day comes, lay hold of him as their only refuge. When all things go well with them, *God is not in their thoughts;* but *in their affliction they will seek him early: then they will cry, Lord, Lord; but he will say to them in that day, Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, for I know you not.*

VII. Lastly, God is such a good as can *give* perfect tranquillity to our minds. What *cannot* do this, though it had all the proper-

ties before mentioned, cannot make us happy. For he is not happy who does not think himself so, whatever cause he may have to think so. Now what in reason can give us disquiet, if we firmly believe that God's providence rules and governs all things for the best, and that he is all that to good men which hath been said of him? Why should not our minds be in perfect repose, when we are secure of the chief good, and have found out that which can make us happy, and is willing to do so, if we be not wanting to ourselves; and by our wilful obstinacy and rebellion against him, do not oppose and frustrate this design.

If a considerate man were left to his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself that he could possibly devise; after he had searched heaven and earth, the result of all his wishes would be, that there were just such a being as we must necessarily conceive God to be: nor would he choose any other friend or benefactor, any other protector for himself, or governor for the whole world, than infinite power conducted and managed by infinite wisdom and goodness; which is the notion of a God. After all his inquiry, he would come to the Psalmist's conclusion, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

Vain man is apt to seek for happiness elsewhere; but when all things are duly con-

sidered, we shall at last settle in David's solution of that great question, *What is the chief good of man? There be many*, says he, *that say, Who will show us any good?* That is, men are generally inquisitive after happiness, but greatly divided in their opinions about it. Most place it in the present enjoyments of this world; but David was fully convinced, that the happiness of man was in God: *There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us: thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.* The great joy of the men of this world is in a plentiful harvest, and the abundance of the good things of this life; but David had found that which gave him more gladness, the favour of God, and *the light of his countenance.* This gave perfect tranquillity to his mind; for so it follows, *I will both lay me down in peace, and rest; for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety.*

I shall now only make two or three inferences, and so conclude.

First, From what has been said, it naturally follows, That God is the only object of our trust and confidence. Man of himself is not sufficient for his own happiness, because he is liable to so many evils and calamities, so many wants and infirmities, which he can neither prevent nor remedy.

Consider him, from under the protection of a superior being, and he is in a most forlorn condition: secure of nothing that he enjoys, and liable to be disappointed of every thing that he hopes for. He is apt to grieve for what he cannot help; to desire what he is never likely to obtain; and to fear, many times, evils which never come upon him. *Thus man walketh in a vain show, and disquieteth himself in vain.* He comes into the world naked and unarmed, and from himself more destitute of the natural means of security and support, than any other creature: for as he alone is made to acknowledge a deity, so God in great wisdom hath provided that none of the other creatures shall have so much need of one. The words of David are the very sense and voice of nature, declaring to mankind their great dependance upon God: *Thou art he that tookest me out of the womb, thou madest me to hope when I was upon my mother's breasts: I was cast upon thee from the womb, thou art my God from my mother's belly: be not far from me, for trouble is near:* trouble is always near to us, and therefore it is happy for us that God is never far off; *for in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

Secondly, We may, from what has been said, learn the infinite obligations we are under to God for his watchful care over us, amidst the innumerable dangers that continually surround us. To his merciful providence alone

we owe, that notwithstanding so many arrows of death are perpetually flying about us, to which we so many ways lie open, we should yet hold out twenty, forty, sixty years, and some longer, untouched, or at least not dangerously wounded by any of them; that, whilst we are thus wonderfully continued in life, our imagination is not let loose upon us, to haunt us with melancholy fears; that we are not delivered up to the horrors of a gloomy and guilty mind; that every day we do not fall into frenzy and distraction, which, next to wickedness and vice, is the sorest calamity and saddest disguise of human nature; I say, next to wickedness and vice, which is a wilful frenzy, a madness not from misfortune but from choice; whereas the other proceeds from natural and necessary causes, such as are in a great measure out of our power, so that we are perpetually liable to it from any secret and sudden disorder of the brain, from the violence of a disease, or the vehement transport of any passion.

Thirdly and lastly, What has been observed shows us how necessary the favour of God is to every man's happiness: and the only way to gain his favour is, by becoming holy and good as he is: then may we rejoice and glory *in God*, as the Psalmist here does, and say, *Whom have I in heaven* but thee? and there is *none upon earth I desire* besides thee. A wicked man dreads God, and he has great reason to

do so; *for he hath no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* When by sin we depart from God, we forsake our own happiness: *salvation is far from the wicked,* says David. And again, *they that are far from thee shall perish, but it is good for me to draw near to God.* Now by holiness and goodness we draw near to him, who alone can make us happy.

To conclude: If we would have God for our happiness, we must be sure to make him our friend; and then we may promise to ourselves all the advantages which one so great and powerful can give us: and there is but one way to establish a firm friendship between God and us, and that is, by living in obedience to his laws: *Ye are my friends,* saith our blessed Lord, *if ye do whatsoever I command you. This is the love of God,* saith St. John, *that we keep his commandments:* and he has prepared such glorious things, *for them that love him, as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.* Which God of his infinite goodness grant we may all at last be made partakers of, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ: to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XV.

OF THE ADVANTAGES OF AN EARLY PIETY.

ECCLES. xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

IT will not be necessary to give an account of the context, any further than to tell you, that this book of the Royal Preacher is a lively description of the vanity of the world in general, and particularly of the life of man. This is the main of his discourse, in which there are here and there scattered serious reflections upon ourselves, and very weighty considerations to quicken our preparations for our latter end.

Among these is the admonition and advice in the words of the text; which indeed concern those that are young, but will yet afford useful matter of meditation to persons of all ages: of great thankfulness to God from those who, by his blessing upon a pious education, have entered upon a religious course betimes. Of deep sorrow and repentance to such as have let slip this best opportunity of their lives; and of taking up a firm resolution of

redeeming that loss, as much as possible, by their future care and diligence. And to them, more especially, who are grown old in the neglect of their duty, the text will minister occasion to turn to God without delay, lest the opportunity of doing it, which is now almost quite spent, be lost for ever.

In discoursing upon the words in my text,

I. I shall consider the nature of the duty there enjoined; and that is, to remember God.

II. I shall consider what there is in the notion of God, as creator, which is more particularly apt to awaken us to the remembrance of him.

III. I shall consider the limitation of this duty, more especially to this particular age of our lives, the days of our youth; why we should begin this work then and not put it off to the time of old age.

I. I shall consider the nature of the duty enjoined in my text, which is to remember our creator. The course of a religious life is not unfitly expressed by our remembrance of God: for to remember a person or thing, is to call them to mind upon all proper and fitting occasions; to think actually of them, so as to do that which the remembrance of them requires. To remember a friend, is to be ready to do him all good offices; to remember a kindness, *is to be ready* to requite it when there is an *opportunity*; to remember an injury, is to be

ready to revenge it; and, in a word, t
member any thing, is to be mindful to do
which the memory of such a thing natu
suggests to us.

So that to remember God, is, frequent
consider that there is such a being as Go
of all power and perfection, who made us
all other things, and hath given us laws to
by suitable to our natures, and will, acco
to our observance or violation of them
ward or punish us; very often in this w
and certainly in the other.

It is to revive often in our minds the tho
of God and of his infinite perfections; a
live continually under the awe of these a
hensions, that he is infinitely wise and
holy and just; that he is always present
us, observes what we do, is intimate to
most secret thoughts, *and will bring every*
into judgment, and every secret thing, whet
be good, or whether it be evil.

The duty then here required, is, so so
we arrive at the use of reason, to begin a
gious course of life; to consecrate the fl
and strength of our days to God's ser
and whilst our mind is yet soft and te
and in a great measure free from all othe
pressions, to be mindful of the being t
above us, and in all our designs and ac
take God into consideration, to do eve
in his fear, and with an eye to his gl

er thy Creator; that is, honour, fear, love, *f*, and serve him; and, in a word, do every ng that becomes one who has God always his thoughts.

II. I shall in the next place consider what there is in the notion of God, as our creator, that is more particularly apt to awaken men to the remembrance of him. The text does not barely require us to remember God, but to remember him as the author of our beings; *remember thy Creator.* This consideration of God, as our creator, naturally suggests to our minds, that his goodness brought us into being, called us out of nothing, and made us to be what we are; *for of his good pleasure we are and were created.* And he is not only our creator, as he gave us our beings at first, but likewise as we are preserved by the same goodness which gave us life and breath; *for of his goodness we ARE,* as well as *were created.*

And can we forget so great a benefactor, and be *unmindful of the God that formed us?* Can we choose but remember the founder of our beings, the great preserver of our lives? And so soon as we discover him to whom we owe our lives and all the blessings of them, can we forbear to do homage to him, and to say with David, *O come, let us worship and fall down and kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is the Lord our God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;* we are his people, and *the sheep of his pasture.*

III. Let us consider the reason of the limitation of this duty more especially to this age of our lives. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them: NOW in the days of thy youth;* by which Solomon plainly designs two things:

First, To engage young persons to begin this necessary work of religion as soon as ever they are capable of taking it into consideration, *remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*

Secondly, to engage them to set about it presently, and not to adjourn it to the time of infirmity and old age.

And how much reason there is to press both these considerations upon young persons, I shall endeavour to show in the following particulars.

1. Because we have the greatest and most sensible obligation *to remember God our Creator in the days of our youth;* in that age, when the blessing of life is new, and the memory of it fresh upon our minds; when our health is in its strength and vigour, and the pleasures and enjoyments of life have their full taste and relish. So Job describes the days of his youth, *O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me: when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in the days of my youth, &c.*

Thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever thou art, if thou art unmindful of God in the best age of thy life, and when the sense of his benefits ought, upon all accounts, to make the strongest and deepest impressions upon thy mind.

2. The reason will be yet stronger to put us upon this, if we consider, that notwithstanding the great obligation which lies upon us to *remember our Creator in the days of our youth*, we are most apt at that time to forget him.

Youth is extremely addicted to pleasure, because it is most capable and most sensible of it; and where we are most apt to be transported, there we are most apt to transgress. Nor doth any thing so besot the mind, and extinguish in it all sense of divine things, as sensual pleasures. If we fall in love with them, they will take off our thoughts from religion, and steal away our hearts from God. *For no man can serve two masters;* and *the carnal mind is enmity against God.*

Besides, youth is rash and inconsiderate, because unexperienced; and consequently not apt to be cautious and prudent, no not as to the future concerns of this temporal life; much less of that which seems to be at so much a greater distance, and for that reason is so very seldom in our thoughts.

3. This age is the fittest to begin a religious course of life. And this does not contradict *the former* argument; for as it is true of chil-

dren, that they are most prone to be idle, and yet fittest to learn; so in the case before us, both are true, that youth is an age wherein we are too apt, if left to ourselves, to forget God and religion; and yet at the same time fittest to receive the impressions of it.

Youth is the proper age of discipline; the age of suppleness, obedience, and patience for labour; which should be plied by parents, before that rigour and stiffness which grows with years comes on. It is a very difficult thing to make impressions upon age, and to deface the evil which hath been deeply imprinted upon young and tender minds. When good instruction has been neglected at first, a conceited ignorance commonly takes possession, and obstructs all the passages through which knowledge and wisdom should enter into us.

It is a mighty advantage to any thing to be planted in a ground newly broken up; and just the same thing is it for young persons to be entered into a religious course, and to have their minds habituated to virtue before vicious customs have got place and strength in them; for whoever shall attempt this afterwards will meet with infinite difficulty.

Let us, therefore, do that which must be done, when we may do it with the greatest advantage, and are likely to meet with the *least* opposition. We should anticipate vice, *and* prevent the devil and the world, by letting God into our hearts betimes, and giving

religion the first possession of our souls. This is the time of sowing our seed, which must by no means be neglected: for the soul will not lie fallow. If our minds be not cultivated by religion, sin and vice will spring up in them; but if our tender years be seasoned with the knowledge and fear of God, this, in all probability, will have a good influence upon the following course of our lives.

4. This is the most acceptable time, because it is the first of our age: under the law, the first-fruits and the first-born were God's. In like manner we should devote the first of our time to him. He is the first and most excellent of beings, and therefore it is fit that the prime of our age, and the excellency of our strength should be dedicated to his service.

An early piety must be very acceptable to God, because it is a sign that we have a true value for his service, when we can give him our good days, and the years which we ourselves have pleasure in; and that we have a grateful sense of his benefits, when we make the quickest and best returns we can, and think nothing too good to render to him from whom we have received all. It is also an argument of great sincerity, which is the soul of all religion and virtue, because we are not drawn to God by those forcible constraints which lie upon men in time of sickness and old age.

As there is joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner, it cannot but be there very pleasing to see a young person, besieged by powerful temptations, acquit himself gloriously, and resolutely hold out against their most violent assaults; to behold one in the prime and flower of his age, courted by pleasures and honours, by the devil and all the bewitching vanities of this world, reject them all, and cleave stedfastly to God, saying, "Let them dote upon these things, who are ignorant of the sincere and solid pleasures of religion and virtue: let them run into the arms of temptation, who can forget God their creator, preserver, and the guide of their youth: as for me, I will serve the Lord, and will employ my time either innocently or usefully, in serving God, and doing good to men: this work shall take up my whole life, there shall be no void or empty space in it; I will endeavour, as much as possible, that there may be no breach in it for the devil and his temptations to enter in: Lord, I will be thine, I have chosen thee for my happiness and my *portion for ever. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. Lo! they that are far from thee shall perish;* to begin and end my days in his fear, and to his glory."

5. Lastly, This age of our life may, for any *thing* we know, be the only time we may *have* for this purpose; and if we defer the

thoughts of God and religion to old age, we may be cut off before this time comes, and *turned into hell with the people that forget God.* The work of religion is the most necessary, and must be done one time or other, or we are certainly lost for ever. We cannot begin it too soon, but we may easily delay it too long; and then we are miserable past all recovery. He that would not venture his immortal soul, and put his everlasting happiness upon the greatest hazard, must make religion his first business and care; must think of God betimes, and *remember his Creator in the days of his youth.*

I have now done with the three things which I proposed to consider from these words. I shall conclude, when I have briefly, first, enforced what I have said to the young; and, secondly, urged those who have neglected this best opportunity of their lives, to repent quickly, lest their case become past remedy.

First, To enforce what has been said to the young. Do not suffer yourselves to be cheated and bewitched by sensual satisfaction, and to be destroyed by ease and prosperity. Let not continual health and pleasure soften and dissolve your spirits, and banish all wise and serious thoughts out of your minds. Be not so foolish and unworthy as to forget God when he is most mindful of you, when *the candle of the Lord shines about your tabernacle*, and you

are enjoying health, strength, and all the sweetness of life. No man knows what an invaluable treasure he prodigally wastes, when he lets slip this golden season; whilst he is yet untainted with vice, and his mind is clear of all bad impressions, and capable of the best; not enslaved to evil, and at liberty to do well.

Consider, That religion and virtue are nothing near so difficult now, as they will be hereafter: that the longer you forget God, and the more you are estranged from him, the less willing you will be to think of him, and to return to him: that your lusts will every day grow stronger, and your hearts by degrees will contract such a hardness, that it will be no easy matter to work upon them.

Therefore, *remember your Creator in the days of your youth: to-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* You have a great work before you; your whole life is no more than sufficient for it, to do it as it ought to be done: do not then think of crowding it into a corner of your life, much less of putting it off to the very end of it: when *that night comes, no man can work.*

Consider further, If we will deny God the hearty and vigorous service of our best days, how can we expect that he will accept the faint and flattering devotions of old age? wise

men are wont to provide some stay and comfort for themselves against the infirmities of that time; that they may have something to lean upon in their weakness, something to mitigate the afflictions of that dark and gloomy evening; that what they cannot enjoy of present pleasure, may in some measure be made up to them in comfortable reflections upon the past actions of a holy and well-spent life.

But on the other hand, if we have neglected religion days without number; if we have lived a vicious life; we have foolishly contrived to make our burthen then heaviest, when we are least able to stand under it; we have provided an infinite matter for repentance when there is hardly any space left for the exercise of it; and whatever is done in it will, I fear, be so done, as to signify but very little, either to our present comfort, or to our future happiness.

Consider this, O young man, in time; and if thou wouldst not have God *cast thee off in thine old age, and forsake thee when thy strength fail, do thou remember him in the days of thy youth; for this is the acceptable time, this is the day of salvation.*

Acquaint thyself with him, and *remember him NOW;* defer not so necessary a work, no not for a moment: begin it just now, that so *thou mayst* have made some good progress *in it before* the *evil days* come, before the sun

and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and all the comforts and joys of life be fled and gone.

Be not deceived, whosoever thou art, for *God is not mocked*: he will not be put off with the *days in which we ourselves have no pleasure.* Offer up thyself a living sacrifice, and not a carcass, if thou wouldst be accepted. Do not provoke the living God by offering up to him faint spirits, feeble hands, dim eyes, and a dead heart. He hath been bountiful to us in giving us the best blessings of life, and all things richly to enjoy; and do we grudge him the most valuable part of our lives, and the *years which we ourselves have pleasure in? Do we thus requite the Lord? Foolish people, and unwise!* Is the Giver of all good unworthy to receive from us any thing that is good?

2. Let me urge those who have neglected this first and best opportunity of their lives, to repent quickly, lest all opportunity of doing it be lost for ever. Resolve to redeem, if it be possible, the time which you should have improved: you have squandered away too much already, waste no more: you have deferred a necessary work too long, delay it no longer. Do not delude yourselves with vain hopes, that if you can but fashion your last breath *into Lord have mercy upon me,* this will prevail with God, and make atonement for the long course of a wicked and sinful life. What strange thoughts have they of God and heaven!

What extravagant conceits of the little evil of sin, and the great easiness of repentance, who can impose upon themselves at this rate!

Bethink yourselves better in time, consider and show yourselves men. What will you do in the day of your distress, who have neglected God in your most flourishing and prosperous condition? What will you say to him in a dying hour? Can you have the face at that time to bespeak him in this manner: "Lord, now the world and my lusts have left me, and I feel myself ready to sink into eternal perdition, I lay hold upon thy mercy to deliver my soul. I have heard strange things of thy goodness, and that thou art merciful even to a miracle. This is what I always trusted to, that after a long life of sin and vanity, thou wouldst at last be pacified with a few penitent words and sighs at the hour of death!"

Is this an address fit to be made to a wise man, much less to the all-wise and just Judge of the world? And yet this seems to be the plain interpretation of a great and habitual sinner's application to Almighty God, when he is just going to appear before his dreadful tribunal.

I say again, let no man deceive you with vain hopes from a slight and sudden repentance; for, as sure as God is true, they shall never see his kingdom, who, instead of seeking it in the first place, make it their last refuge and retreat.

The ever-blessed God is himself abundantly sufficient for his own happiness, and does not need our company to make any addition to it: nor yet is heaven so desolate a place, or so utterly void of inhabitants, that, like some newly discovered plantation, it should be glad to receive the most vile and profligate persons, the scum and refuse of mankind. An innumerable company of glorious angels, much nobler creatures than the best of men, people those blessed regions. *Thousands of thousands continually stand before God, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him.*

God indeed is so good as to desire our happiness as earnestly as if it were necessary to his own: but he is happy in and from himself; and without him it is impossible we should be happy; nay, we must of necessity be for ever miserable.

To conclude: If we would have God to accept us in a dying hour, and our blessed Saviour to remember us now he is in his kingdom, let us think of him betimes, and acquaint ourselves with him, that we may be at peace, *NOW;* before *the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when we shall say, we have no pleasure in them.*

O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! Which God of his infinite goodness grant that we may all seriously lay to heart, in this our

day, and may learn betimes *so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom;* for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XVI.

AGAINST EVIL SPEAKING.

TITUS iii. 2.

To speak evil of no man.

MY text is a dissuasive from one of the reigning vices of the age, evil speaking; by which men contract so much guilt to themselves, and create so much trouble to others; and from which, it is to be feared, few or none are wholly free. *For who is he*, saith the son of Sirach, *that hath not offended with his tongue?* Eccl. xix. 16. *In many things*, saith St. James, *we offend all: and if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.* James iii. 2.

I shall reduce what I have to say on evil speaking to five heads.

I. I shall consider the nature of this vice, and wherein it consists.

II. I shall consider the due extent of this *prohibition, To speak evil of no man.*

III. I shall show the evil of this practice, both in the causes and effects of it.

IV. I shall add some farther considerations to dissuade men from it.

V. I shall give some rules and directions for the prevention and cure of it.

I. I shall consider what this sin or vice of evil speaking, here forbidden by the apostle, is: it consists in saying things of others which tend to their disparagement and reproach, to the taking away or lessening their reputation; and that, whether the things said be true or not.

If the thing be true, and we know it so, it is defamation: to say the evil of others which is true, unless we have some good reason for it, is a fault, because it tends to the prejudice of our neighbour's reputation; and is therefore contrary to that charity and goodness which Christianity requires. If what we say to the prejudice of another, be false, and we know it to be so, then it is calumny; and if we do not know it, but take it upon report, it is however slander; and the more injurious, because groundless and undeserved.

Again, It is the vice condemned in the text, whether we be the first authors of an ill report, or relate it from others; because he that is evil *spoken of* is equally defamed either way.

So, whether we speak evil of a man to his *face*, or behind his back: the former, indeed,

seems the more generous, and is what we call reviling; the latter more mean and base, and that which is properly called backbiting.

Lastly, It is evil speaking, whether it be done directly and in express terms, or more obscurely, and by insinuation; whether by way of downright reproach, or with some crafty preface of commendation; for so it have the effect to defame, the manner of address does not much alter the case: the one may be more dexterous, but is not less faulty. Many times the deepest wounds are given by these smoother, and more artificial ways of slander; because they insinuate something that is much worse than is said, and are very apt to create, in the unwary, a strong belief of something that is very bad, though they know not what it is. In a word, whatever tends to lessen a man's reputation is the sin forbidden in the text.

II. We will consider the extent of this prohibition, to speak evil of no man; and the due limitations of it. For it is not to be understood absolutely to forbid us to say any thing concerning others that is bad: this in some cases may be necessary, and our duty; and in several cases very fit and reasonable; as, for the prevention of some great evil, or the procuring some considerable good to ourselves or others.

But because this may not be direction suf-

ficient, I shall instance in some of the principal cases, wherein men are warranted to speak evil of others, without offending against the text.

1. It is very commendable, and often our duty to do this, in order to amend the person of whom evil is spoken. In such a case, we may tell him of his faults privately; or where it is improper to use that freedom, we may reveal them to one that is more fit to reprove him, and will probably only use this discovery for his amendment; which is so far from being a breach of charity, that it is one of the best testimonies of it: perhaps he may not be guilty of what hath been reported of him; it is then a kindness to give him the opportunity of vindicating himself: if he be guilty, being prudently admonished, he may reform.

But then we must take care that nothing of our own passion be mingled with our reproof, and that, under pretence of reforming, we do not reproach and revile. It requires a great deal of address so to manage reproof, as not to provoke the person whom we reprove, instead of amending him.

2. It is our duty, when we are legally called, to bear witness concerning the fault and crime of another. A good man would not be an accuser, unless the public good, or the prevention of some great evil should require it; but

when he is called to give testimony in this kind, in obedience to the laws, and out of reverence to the oath taken in such cases, it would be an unpardonable fault in him to conceal the truth or any part of it.

3. It is lawful to publish the faults of others in our own necessary vindication. When we cannot conceal another's faults without betraying our own innocence, no charity requires us to suffer ourselves to be defamed, to save the reputation of our neighbour. Charity begins at home; and though a man had ever so much goodness, he would first secure his own good name, and then be concerned for that of others.

4. This also is lawful for caution to a third person, who is in danger to be infected by the company, or ill example of another; or may be greatly prejudiced by reposing too much confidence in him, having no suspicion of his bad qualities; but here we ought to take care, that the ill character we give, be spread no further than is necessary to the good end we designed in it.

These are all the usual cases in which it may be necessary for us to speak evil of other men. And these are so evidently reasonable, that the prohibition in the text cannot be extended to them.

III. We will consider the evil of this practice, *both in* the causes and consequences *it.*

First, As to the causes: one of the most common is ill-nature; and, by a general mistake, ill-nature passeth for wit, as cunning doth for wisdom; though in truth they are as different as vice and virtue.

There is no greater evidence of the bad temper of mankind, than their proneness to evil speaking. For, as our Saviour says, *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;* and therefore we commonly incline to the uncharitable side. Most love rather to hear evil of others than good, and are secretly pleased with ill reports, though at the same time they hate those that spread them; rightly concluding that these very persons will do the same for them in other companies.

But we are more especially pleased, if the evil that we hear, concerns one of another party, and that differs from us in matters of religion. All parties seem to be agreed in this, that they do God great service in blasting the reputation of their adversaries: and though they all pretend to be Christians, and the disciples of him who taught nothing but kindness, meekness, and charity; yet it is strange to see how eager they are to defame one another in the most bitter manner. The good they hear of an adversary is cautiously received; but every man is a substantial author of an ill report.

I do not apply this to any sort of men; all are to blame. The good spoken of others we

easily forget, or seldom mention; but the evil lies uppermost in our memories, and is ready to be published upon all occasions: nay, what is still more ill-natured and unjust, many times, when we do not believe it ourselves, we tell it to others, and venture it to be believed according to the charity of those to whom it is told.

Another cause of the frequency of this vice is, that many are so bad themselves. For to think and speak ill of others is not only a bad thing, but a sign of a bad man. Our blessed Saviour, speaking of the evil of the last days, gives this as a reason for the great decay of charity; *because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.* When men are bad, they are glad of any opportunity to censure others, and endeavour to bring things to a level; hoping it will be some justification of their own faults, if they can but make others appear equally guilty.

A third cause of evil speaking is malice and revenge. When we are blinded by our passions we do not consider what is true, but what is mischievous; we care not whether the evil we speak be true or not; nay, many are so base as to invent and raise false reports on purpose to blast the reputations of those by whom they think themselves injured. This is a diabolical temper; and therefore St. James *tells us,* that the *slanderous* tongue is set on fire *of hell.*

A fourth cause of this vice is envy. Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others, and do what they can to discredit their commendable qualities; thinking their own character lessened by them. They greedily entertain, and industriously publish, what may raise themselves upon the ruin of other men's reputation.

A fifth cause of evil speaking is impertinence and curiosity; an itch of talking of affairs which do not concern us. Some love to mingle themselves in all business, and are loath to seem ignorant of such important news as the faults and follies of men; and therefore with great care pick up ill stories to entertain the next company they meet; not perhaps out of any great malice, but for want of something better to talk of.

Lastly, Many do this out of wantonness, and for diversion; so little do they consider that a man's reputation is too great and tender a concern to be jested with; and that a slanderous tongue *bites like a serpent, and wounds like a sword.* What can be more barbarous, next to sporting with a man's life, than to play with his honour and good name, which to some is dearer than life? *As a madman,* saith Solomon, *who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; so is the man* that defameth his *neighbour, and saith, Am* I not in sport?

Such and so bad are the causes of this vice. I proceed,

Secondly, To consider its pernicious effects; both to others and to ourselves.

To those who are slandered it is certainly a great injury, commonly a high provocation, but always matter of no small grief.

It is certainly a great injury, and if the evil which we say of them be not true, it is an injury beyond reparation. It is an injury that descends to a man's children and posterity; because the good or ill name of the father is derived down to them, and many times the best thing he has to leave them, is the reputation of his unblemished virtue. And do we make no conscience to rob his innocent children of the best part of this small patrimony, and of all the kindness that would have been done them for their father's sake, if his reputation had not been so undeservedly stained? Can we jest with so serious a matter? with an injury so very hard to be repented of as it ought; because, in such a case, no repentance will be acceptable without restitution, if it be in our power. And perhaps it will undo us in this world to make it; as, not to make it, will be our ruin in the other.

Even suppose the matter of the slander true, yet no man's reputation is considerably stained, though never so deservedly, without great hurt to him; and it is odds but the charge, by passing through several hands, is aggravated beyond truth, every one being apt to add *something* to it.

Besides the injury, it is commonly a high provocation; the consequence of which may be dangerous and desperate quarrels. This reason the wise son of Sirach gives why we should defame no man: *Whether it be*, says he, *to a friend or a foe, talk not of other men's lives; for he hath heard and observed thee*; that is, one way or other it will probably come to his knowledge, *and when the time cometh, he will show his hatred;* will take the first opportunity to revenge it.

At best, it is always matter of grief to the person that is defamed; and Christianity, which is the best natured institution in the world, forbids us to do those things whereby we may grieve one another.

To ourselves, the consequences of this vice are as bad or worse. He that is wont to speak evil of others, gives a bad character of himself, even to those whom he desires to please; who, if they be wise enough, will conclude that he speaks of them to others, as he does of others to them. What our Saviour says in this case is well worth our consideration, that *with what measure we mete to others, it shall be measured to us again;* and that, many times, *heaped up* and *running over*. For there is hardly any thing wherein mankind use more strict justice and equality, than in rendering *evil for evil* and *railing for railing*. Nay, revenge often goes further than words. A reproachful speech hath frequently cost the slanderer his

life, or occasioned his murdering another; perhaps with the loss of his own soul: and I wonder that among Christians this matter is not more laid to heart.

And though neither of these mischiefs should happen to us, yet this may be inconvenient many other ways. For who knows, in the chance of things, and the mutability of human affairs, whose kindness he may stand in need of before he dies? So that did a man only consult his own safety and quiet, he ought to refrain from evil speaking. *What man is he,* saith the Psalmist, *that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good: keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood.* Psalm xxxiv. 12, 13.

But there is an infinitely greater danger hanging over us from God. If we allow ourselves in this evil practice, all our religion is vain. So St. James expressly tells us, *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.* St. Paul puts slanderers amongst those that *shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* 1 Cor. vi. 10. And our blessed Saviour hath told us, that *by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned.* To which I will add the counsel given us by the wise man, refrain your *tongue from backbiting, for there is no word so secret that shall go for nought,* and the mout

that slandereth slayeth the soul. Wisdom of Solomon i. 11. I proceed in the

IVth place, to add some further arguments to take men off from this vice: As,

1. That speech is bestowed upon us not to enable us to be hurtful and injurious, but helpful and beneficial to one another. So that we pervert the use of speech, when we abuse this faculty to the injury and reproach of any.

2. Consider, How cheap a kindness it is to speak well, at least not to speak ill of others. A good word is an easy obligation, but not to speak ill requires only our silence. Some instances of charity are chargeable; but were a man ever so covetous, he might afford another his good word; at least he might refrain from speaking ill of him; especially if it be considered how dear many have paid for a reproachful word.

3. Consider, That no quality ordinarily recommends one more to the favour of men, than to be free from this vice. Such a man's friendship every one desires; and next to piety and righteousness, nothing is thought a greater commendation, than that he was never, or very rarely, heard to speak ill of any.

4. Let every man lay his hand upon his heart, and consider how himself is apt to be affected with this usage. Speak thy conscience, man, and say whether, as bad as thou art, thou wouldst not be glad to have thy

faults concealed, and not to be hardly spoken of, by those whom thou didst never offend by word or deed? But with what face dost thou expect this from others, to whom thy carriage hath been so contrary? Nothing surely is more equal and reasonable than that known rule, *what thou wouldst have no man do to thee, that do thou to no man.*

5. Lastly, When you are going to censure others, consider whether you do not lie open to just reproach in the same, or some other kind. Therefore give no occasion, no example of this barbarous usage of one another.

There are very few so free either from infirmities or greater faults, as not to be subject to reproach upon one account or other; even the wisest and most virtuous have some little vanity, or affectation, which lays them open to the raillery of a mimical and malicious wit; therefore we should often turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and remember our Saviour's rule, *he that is without sin, let him cast the first stone.*

V. I shall give some directions for the prevention and cure of this great evil.

1. Never say any evil of another, but what you certainly know. Whenever you positively accuse a man of any crime, though it be in private and among friends, speak as if you were upon your oath, because God sees and hears you. This, not only charity, but justice and regard to truth demand of us. He

easily credits an ill report, is almost as faulty as the first inventor of it. Therefore never speak evil of any upon common fame, which for the most part is false, but almost always uncertain.

2. Before you speak evil of another, consider whether he hath not obliged you by some real kindness, and then it is a bad return to speak ill of him who hath done you good. Consider also whether you may not come hereafter to be acquainted with him, related to him, or in want of his favour whom you have thus injured? And whether it may not be in his power to revenge a spiteful and needless word by a shrewd turn? So that if a man made no conscience of hurting others, yet he should in prudence have some consideration of himself.

3. Let us accustom ourselves to be truly sorry for the faults of men, and then we shall take no pleasure in publishing them. Common humanity requires this of us, considering the great infirmities of our nature, and that we also are liable to be tempted; considering likewise how severe a punishment every crime is to itself, and how terribly it exposeth a man to the wrath of God. He is not a good Christian, that is not heartily sorry for the faults even of his greatest enemies; and if he be so, he will discover them no farther than is necessary to some good end.

4. Whenever we hear any man evil spoke

of, if we have heard any good of him, let us say that, It is always more humane and more honourable to vindicate others, than to accuse them. Possibly the good you have heard of them may not be true, but it is much more probable that the evil is not; however, it is better to preserve the credit of the bad, than to stain the reputation of the innocent. Were it necessary that a man should be evil spoken of, his good and bad qualities should be mentioned together, otherwise he may be strangely misrepresented, and an indifferent man may be made a monster.

They that will observe nothing in a wise man, but his oversights and follies; nothing in a good, but his failings and infirmities, may render both despicable. Should we heap together all the passionate speeches, all the imprudent actions of the best man, and present them all at one view, concealing his wisdom and virtues; he, in this disguise, would look like a madman or a fury: and yet if his life were fairly represented in the manner it was led, he would appear to all the world to be an admirable and excellent person. But how numerous soever any man's ill qualities are, it is but just that he should have the due praise of his few real virtues.

5. That you may not speak ill, do not *delight* to hear it of any. Give no countenance to busybodies: if you cannot decently

reprove them because of their qu
the discourse some other way; or,
not to mind it, signify that you do

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excuse of another, and make revenge an apology for reviling.

2. Others allege, that if this doctrine were practised, there would not be matter enough for pleasant conversation. But granting that there is some pleasure in invective, I hope there is much greater in innocence; the more we consider this, the truer we shall find it; and whenever we are serious, we must acknowledge it. When a man examines himself impartially before the sacrament, or is put in mind upon a death-bed to make reparation for injuries done in this kind, he will then certainly be of this mind, and wish he had not done them. For it certainly is one necessary qualification for the blessed sacrament, that we *be in love and charity with our neighbours;* with which temper of mind this quality is utterly inconsistent.

3. There is yet a more specious plea than either of the former, that men will be encouraged to do ill if they can escape the tongues of others. For many who will venture upon the displeasure of God, will yet abstain from doing bad things for fear of reproach from men: besides, that this seems the most proper punishment of many faults which the laws of men can take no notice of.

Admitting all this to be true, yet it does not *seem a laudable way to punish one fault by another:* and though we should hold our

reprove them because of their quality, the discourse some other way; or, by s not to mind it, signify that you do not

6. Let every man mind his own du concern. Do but endeavour in good to mend thyself, and it will be work e and leave thee little time to talk of oth

Lastly, Let us set a watch before th of our lips, and not speak but upon co tion: I do not mean to speak finely, b Especially when thou speakest of othe sider of whom, and what thou art g speak; use great caution and circums in this matter; look well about thee, o side of the thing, and on every perso company, before thy words slip from which, when they are once out of t are for ever out of thy power.

I have done with the five things I p to consider. But because hardly an can be so clear, but something may against it; nor any thing so bad, bu thing will be pleaded in excuse for it; therefore take notice of two or thre made for evil speaking.

1. Some pretend mighty injury and cation. If in the same kind, it seem art sensible of it; and therefore thou men oughtest to abstain from it; but kind soever it be, the Christian religio revenge. Therefore do not plead

selves. Let no provocation make thee lose thy patience. Part with no one virtue, because some endeavour to rob thee of the reputation of all the rest. When men speak ill of thee, do as a wise heathen (Plato) said he would in that case, live so, as nobody may believe them.

All that now remains is to urge you and myself to practise what we so plainly see to be our duty. Many are so taken up with the deep points and mysteries of religion, that they never think of the common duties of human life. But the Christian religion hath made faith and a good life inseparable. True faith is necessary in order to a good life, and a good life is the genuine product of a right belief; and therefore the one ought never to be pressed to the prejudice of the other.

But because *the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword,* yea, sharper than calumny itself; and pierceth the very hearts and consciences of men, laying us open to ourselves, and convincing us of our secret as well as visible faults; I shall therefore at one view represent to you what is dispersedly said concerning this sin in the holy word of God.

And I have purposely reserved this to the last, because it is more persuasive than any human discourse. Be pleased then to consider, that there is scarce any black catalogue of sins

in the Bible but we find this among them; in the company of the worst actions and most irregular passions of men. *Out of the heart*, says our Saviour, *proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, false-witness, evil-speakings*. Matt. xv. 19. And the apostle ranks *back-biters* with *fornicators, murderers*, and *haters of God*. Rom. i. 29. and with those of whom it is expressly said, that *they shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. 1 Cor. vi. 10.

And when he enumerates the sins of the last times, *Men*, says he, *shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, evil speakers, without natural affection, perfidious, false accusers, &c.* 2 Tim. iii. 2, 3. And now, after all this, do we hardly think that to be a sin, which is in Scripture so frequently ranked with murder, adultery, and the blackest crimes; such as are inconsistent with the life and power of religion, and will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of God? Do we believe the Bible to be the word of God; and can we allow ourselves in the common practice of a sin, than which there is hardly any fault of men's lives more frequently mentioned, more severely reproved, and more odiously branded in that holy book?

To conclude: The sin of evil speaking is *plainly* condemned by the word of God; and *the* duty of refraining from it is as easy, as a resolute silence upon just occasion; as reason-

able, as prudence, justice, charity, and the preservation of peace and good will among men can make it; and of as necessary and indispensable an obligation, as the authority of God can render any thing.

Upon all which considerations, let David's deliberate resolution be ours; *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue.* Psalm xxxix. 1. And I verily believe, that would we but heartily endeavour to amend this one fault, we should soon be better men in our whole lives; I mean, that the correcting of this vice, together with those that are nearly allied to it, would make us owners of a great many considerable virtues, and carry us on a good way towards perfection; it being hardly to be imagined, that a man who makes conscience of his words, should not take an equal or a greater care of his actions. And this I take to be both the true meaning, and the true reason of that saying of St. James, with which I shall conclude: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.*

SERMON XVII.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE TRUE RELIG ANSWERED.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord you this day whom you will serve.

IN discoursing upon these words, I s present wholly apply myself to remo prejudices against religion, which aris the seeming contrariety of its laws to th ral inclinations of men; and the uneas it in point of practice. I will endea give a satisfactory answer to each part objection.

To begin with the former.

And here I would observe, first, th is a great degeneracy and corruption of nature from what it was originally occasioned by the voluntary transgressi plain and easy command given by Goc first parents. The weakness contrac their fall naturally descends upon u visibly discovers itself in our inclinat evil, and impotence to that which is go

And of this degeneracy the wiser the heathen were very sensible; yet t so just as not to charge it upon God

some corruption contracted by the soul in a former state, before its union with the body. And this was the best account they were able to give of it, without the light of divine revelation.

Thus the degeneracy of human nature is universally acknowledged, and God acquitted from being the cause of it.

But then this degeneracy is not total; though our faculties be much weakened and disordered, yet they are not destroyed nor wholly perverted. Our judgment and conscience still dictate to us what is good, and what we ought to do; and the impressions of the natural law, as to the great lines of our duty, are still legible upon our hearts: so that the law written in God's word is not contrary to the law written upon our hearts.

It is also very visible, that the sad effects of this degeneracy do not appear equally and alike in all; for though a proneness to evil, and some seeds of it be in all, yet we may plainly discover in many, very forward inclinations to some kinds of virtue; which, being cultivated by education, may under the ordinary influence of God's grace be carried on, with great ease, to perfection.

And there are others, who are not so strongly inclined to evil, but that by good instruction and example in their tender years, they may without great difficulty, be formed to goodne

In some, indeed, a strong propensity to particular kinds of vice very early appears: but the case of these is not desperate; though a greater care and a much more prudent management is required in their education: and if, when they come to riper years, they take due pains with themselves, and earnestly seek the assistance of God's grace, I doubt not but that they may, by degrees, master their unhappy dispositions. For next to the being and perfections of God, and the immortality of our own souls, there is no principle of religion that I more firmly believe than this, that if we heartily beg God's assistance, and be not wanting to ourselves, he will afford it to every one of us in proportion to our need of it; that he is always even beforehand with us, and prevents every man with the gracious offers of his help. He tenderly considers every man's case and circumstances, and it is we that pull destruction upon ourselves, with the works of our own hands; but as sure as God is good and just, no man is ruined for want of having sufficient help and aid afforded to him by God for his recovery.

2. It is likewise to be considered, that God did not design to create man in the full possession of happiness, but to train him up to it, by the trial of his obedience, which trial there could not be without some difficulty in our duty, either by reason of powerful temptations

from without, or of perverse inclinations from within.

Our first parents, in their state of innocency, had only the trial of temptation from without, to which they yielded, and were overcome. We labour under a double difficulty; being assaulted by temptations from without, and incited by evil inclinations from within: but then, to balance these, we have a double advantage; that a greater reward is proposed to us, than for ought we know would have been conferred upon our first parents, had they continued innocent; and that we are endued with a supernatural power to conflict with these difficulties. So that, according to the merciful dispensation of God, all this struggle, between our inclination and our duty, only serves to give a fairer opportunity for the trial of our obedience, and for the more glorious reward of it.

3. God hath provided an universal remedy for this degeneracy and weakness of human nature; so that what we lost by the first Adam, is abundantly repaired by the second. *As by one man*, saith St. Paul, *sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so the grace of God hath abounded to all men by Jesus Christ.* Rom. v. And that, to such a degree, as really to enable those, who seem to be naturally most corrupt to subdue, if they be not wanting to themselves, all their bad inclinations.

Hence we may, without any reflection upon God, acknowledge, that though he did not at first create man sick and weak, yet man having made himself so, his posterity are born so. But then, God hath not left us helpless in this miserable state, into which wilful transgression brought us; but as he commands us to be sound, so he affords us sufficient aids of his grace by Jesus Christ for our recovery.

And though *there is a law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and captivating us to the law of sin and death;* though our sensitive appetites and passions are apt to rebel against our reason and natural conscience, yet every Christian may say with St. Paul, *Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ;* that is, hath enabled us to conquer the rebellious motions of sin, by the powerful assistance of that grace, which is so plentifully offered to us in the gospel. And this is the case of all who live under the gospel; as for others, as their case is best known to God, so we have no reason to doubt, but his infinite goodness and mercy takes that care of them which becomes a merciful creator; though both the measures and the methods of his mercy towards them, are secret and unknown to us.

4. The hardest contest between man's inclination and his duty, is in those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, and by that

means rendered their duty much more difficult to themselves than it otherwise would be; having greatly increased the evil inclinations of nature by wicked practice. For the Scripture plainly supposeth, that men may debauch even corrupt nature.

The sad condition of these requires no ordinary efforts to rescue them: they must, to the most vigorous endeavours, join an earnest application to God for his powerful grace and assistance to help them out of their miserable state. A just sense of the extreme danger in which we are, will inspire us with a mighty resolution. When we are severely pressed, we find a power in ourselves which we thought we had not; and the divine aid, ever ready to be afforded to well disposed minds, and such as are sincerely bent to return to God and their duty, can enable us to surmount the greatest difficulties.

5. From what hath been said, it evidently appears, that the destruction of any of us is entirely from ourselves; that the way to eternal happiness has no difficulties in it, which resolution, diligence and patience may not overcome, and which were permitted to be in it for no other purpose than that we might win and wear a more glorious crown, and be fit to receive a more ample reward from God's *bounty* and goodness; yea, in some sense, I *may say* from his justice; for he is not unrigh

teous to forget our work and labour of love. He will fully consider all the pains we take, and all the difficulties we struggle with in his service. So that this objection, from the clashing of our duty with our inclination, is I hope, fully answered; since God hath provided so powerful a remedy against our natural impotency and infirmity, by the grace of the gospel.

And though the first entrance upon a religious course of life be very difficult to those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, yet there are such charms in the ways of wisdom and virtue, that a little acquaintance with them will soon make them more delightful than any other course: and who will grudge any pains to bring himself into so safe and happy a condition? After we have trod the paths of religion and profaneness, of virtue and vice, we shall certainly find, that nothing is so wise, so easy, and so comfortable, as to be virtuous, and always to do what we are inwardly convinced we ought to do. Nor would I desire more of any man in this matter than to follow the soberest convictions of his own mind, and to do that, which upon the most serious consideration, at all times, in prosperity and affliction, in sickness and health, in the time of life, and at the hour of death, he would judge it wisest and safest for him to do.

I proceed to the latter part of the objection

I was to answer, namely, the uneasiness of religion in point of practice.

There was, I confess, some pretence for this objection in the Jewish religion; which, by the multitude of its positive institutions and external observances, was very burdensome.

But the pure Christian religion, as it was delivered by our Saviour, has hardly any thing in it that is positive, except the two sacraments; it has nothing in it but what every man's reason either dictates to him to be necessary, or approves as highly fit and reasonable.

The laws of this religion abridge us of no pleasure that a wise man can desire and safely enjoy: the pleasure of commanding our appetites, and governing our passions, by the rules of reason, (which are the laws of God) is infinitely to be preferred before any sensual pleasure whatsoever; because it is the pleasure of wisdom and discretion; and gives us the satisfaction of having done what is best and fittest for reasonable creatures to do.

Nothing is more certain in reason and experience, than that every inordinate appetite is a punishment to itself; and is perpetually defeating its own satisfaction. For instance, intemperance in eating and drinking, instead of delighting and satisfying nature, does but load and cloy it; and instead of quenching a natural thirst, which it is extremely pleasant to do, creates an unnatural one, which is

troublesome and endless. The pleasure of revenge, as soon as it is executed, turns into grief and pity, consciousness of guilt, remorse, and a thousand melancholy wishes that we had restrained ourselves from it. And the same is as evident in other sensual excesses, not so fit to be described. We may trust Epicurus for this, that there can be no true pleasure without temperance in the use of pleasure. And God hath set us no other bounds concerning the use of sensual enjoyments, but that we take care not to be injurious to ourselves, or others, in the kind or degree of them. All sensual excess is naturally attended with a double inconvenience; as it goes beyond the limits of nature, it begets bodily pains and diseases; as it transgresseth the rules of reason and religion, it breeds guilt and remorse in the mind. And, beyond comparison, the two greatest evils in this world are, a diseased body, and a discontented mind. And in this I am sure I speak to the inward feeling and experience of men; and say nothing, but what every vicious man finds, and has a more lively sense of, than is to be expressed by words.

There is no pleasure comparable to that of innocency, and freedom from the stings of a guilty conscience; this is a pure and spiritual pleasure, much above any sensual delight. *And* yet among all the delights of sense, that

of health (which is the natural consequent of a sober, chaste, and regular life) is a pleasure far beyond that of any vice; for it is the life of life, and what gives a grateful relish to all our other enjoyments. It is not indeed so violent and transporting a pleasure, but it is pure, even, lasting, and hath no guilt and regret, no sorrow and trouble in it, or after it; which is a worm that infallibly breeds in all vicious and unlawful pleasures, and makes them to be bitterness in the end.

There are so many unanswerable objections against vice, from the unreasonableness and ugliness of it, from the remorse which attends it, from the endless misery which follows it, that none but the rash and inconsiderate can commit it. It is the daughter of inadvertency, blindness and folly; and the mother of guilt, repentance and woe. There is no pleasure which will abide with us to the last, but that of innocency and well doing. All sin is folly: and, as a wise Heathen (Seneca) truly says, all folly soon grows sick and weary of itself. The pleasure of it is slight and superficial, but the trouble and remorse of it pierceth our very hearts.

To object to religion, that it restrains us of our liberty, would be most unreasonable; since the contrary is evidently true, that sin and vice are the greatest slavery. For he is truly a slave, who is not at liberty to follow his own

judgment, and to do those things which he is inwardly convinced it is best for him to do; but is subject to the tyrannical power of his lusts and passions. One vice or passion bids him go, and he goes; another, come, and he comes; and a third, do this, and he doth it: he is at perpetual variance with his own mind, and continually committing the things which he condemns in himself.

But the service of God, and obedience to his laws, are perfect liberty; because the law of God requires nothing of us, but what is recommended to us by our own reason, and the advantage of doing it. And though in some things God exacts obedience of us more indispensably, and under severer penalties, it is because those things are in their nature more necessary to our felicity. How then could God possibly have dealt more kindly with us, than to oblige us most strictly to that which is most for our good; and to make such laws for us, as, if we live in obedience to them, will infallibly make us happy? So that, taking all things into consideration, the interest of our bodies and our souls, of the present and the future, of this world and the other, religion is the most reasonable and wise, the most comfortable and compendious course that any man can take, in order to his own happiness.

The consideration whereof ought to prevail with us to yield a ready and cheerful obe-

dience to the laws of God; which are in truth so many acts of favour to mankind, the real privileges of our nature, and the proper means and causes of our happiness; restraining us from nothing but from doing mischief to ourselves, from playing the fool, and making ourselves miserable.

And therefore, instead of neglecting religion upon pretence of the unreasonable restraints of it, we ought to thank God heartily, that he hath so strictly enjoined us to pursue our true interest; hath taken that care of us as to set bounds to our disorderly appetites by our duty; and, in giving us rules to live by, hath no ways complied with our foolish inclinations, to our real prejudice; but hath made those things necessary for us to do, which in all respects are best for us; and which, if we were perfectly left to our own liberty, ought to be our first choice: he hath made the folly and inconvenience of sin so grossly palpable, that every man may see it beforehand, who will but consider, and at the beginning of a bad course look to the end of it; and they that will not consider this, shall be forced, from woful experience, at last to acknowledge it, when they find the dismal consequences of their vices, still meeting them at one turn or other.

And now, I hope, that upon a due and full consideration of what hath been said, it cannot seem evil unto any of us to serve the Lord:

I hope it will appear, that a religious and virtuous life is not only upon all accounts the most prudent, but, after we are entered upon it, and accustomed to it, the most pleasant course that any man can take; and not more our duty, than it is our privilege and our happiness.

Let us suppose, that the laws of God had been just the reverse of what they now are; that he had commanded us, under severe penalties, to deal falsely and fraudulently with our neighbours; to demean ourselves ungratefully to our best benefactors; to be drunk every day, and to pursue sensual pleasures to the endangering of our health and life; how should we have complained of the unreasonableness of these laws, and have murmured at the slavery of such intolerable impositions? And now that God hath commanded us the contrary, things every way agreeable to our reason and interest, we are yet displeased. What will content us? We are not contented with the laws of God as they are, and yet the contrary to them we should have esteemed the greatest grievance in the world!

If then the laws of God, how contrary soever to our vicious inclinations, be really calculated for our benefit, *Choose you whom you will serve;* God, or your lusts. And take up a speedy resolution in so great and pressing a concern; choose you this day.

Where there is great hazard in doing a thing, it is good to deliberate long before we undertake it; but that which is evidently safe, needs no deliberation; and what is absolutely necessary, will admit of none.

Therefore resolve out of hand; *to-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin:* in the days of your youth and health; *for that is the acceptable time, that is the day of salvation:* before the evil day comes, and you be driven to it by the terrible apprehension and approach of death. Too late, perhaps, it may then be to make the service of God your choice; nay then, indeed, it can hardly be called men's choice, as they are urged and forced to it by their fears. They have done what they can, by their insolent defiance of the Almighty, to make themselves miserable; and now that they can stand out no longer against him, they are contented at last to be beholden to him to make them happy. The mercies of God are vast and boundless, but yet methinks it is too great a presumption to design beforehand to make the mercy of God the sanctuary and retreat of a sinful life.

To draw to a conclusion of this discourse: If safety, pleasure, liberty, wisdom, virtue, or even happiness itself have any allurements, *religion* hath them all. What a wise Heathen (*Tully*) says of philosophy, is much more

true of the Christian religion, the wisdom
philosophy which is from above; We
never praise it enough, since whoever
according to the rules of it, may pass
whole age of his life (I may add, his v
duration, this life and the other) wi
trouble.

Philosophy hath given us several plai
rules for attaining peace and tranquilli
mind, but they fall very much short of b
ing men to it. Whereas the Christian
gion hath effectually done all that philos
pretended to and aimed at. The precept
promises of the Holy Scriptures are every
sufficient for our comfort, and for our in
tion in righteousness; they are sufficie
correct all the errors, to bear us up under a
evils and adversities of human life; espe
that holy and heavenly doctrine which i
tained in the admirable sermons of our Sa
whose excellent discourses when we
which of the philosophers do we not de
None of them could, upon sure grounds
that encouragement to their scholars,
our Saviour does to his disciples; *take m
upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall fin
to your souls. For my yoke is easy, a
burden is light.*

The Christian religion, sincerely be
and practised, gives perfect rest an
quillity to the mind: it frees us from

of an evil conscience, from the power of our lusts, and from the slavish fear of death, and of the vengeance of another world. It builds our comfort upon a rock, which will abide all storms, and remain in every condition unshaken. *He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them* (saith our Lord) *I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.*

In short, religion makes the life of man a wise design, regular and constant to itself; because it unites all our resolutions and actions in one great end: whereas, without religion, the life of man is a wild, and fluttering, and inconsistent thing, without any certain scope and design. The vicious live at random, and act by chance: for they that walk by no rule, can carry on no settled and steady design. It would pity one's heart to see, how hard such men are put to it for diversion, what a burden time is to them; and how solicitous they are to devise ways, not to spend it, but to squander it! Their great grievance is consideration, and to be obliged to be intent upon any thing that is serious. They hurry from one folly to another; and plunge themselves into drink, not to quench their thirst, but their guilt; and are beholden to every vain man, and to every trifling occasion, that can but help to take time off their hands. Wretched and inconsiderate men! who have so vast work before them, the happiness of all eter

to provide for, and yet are at a loss how to employ their time! So that irreligion and vice makes life an extravagant and unnatural thing, because it perverts the natural order of things. For instance; according to nature, men labour to get an estate, to free themselves from temptations to rapine and injury, to supply their own wants, and to relieve the needs of others. But the covetous man heaps up riches, not to enjoy them, but to have them; starves in the midst of plenty, and most unnaturally robs himself of that which is his own; making a hard shift to be as poor and miserable with a great estate, as any man can be without it. According to nature, men eat and drink that they may live; but the voluptuous only live that they may eat and drink. Nature in all sensual enjoyments designs pleasure, which may certainly be had within the limits of virtue: but vice rashly pursues pleasure into the enemies quarters; and never stops till the sinner be surrounded and seized by pain and torment.

So that take away God and religion, and men live to no purpose; without proposing any worthy and considerable end of life to themselves. Whereas the fear of God, and the care of our immortal souls, fixeth us upon one great design, to which our whole life, and all the actions of it are ultimately referred. When we acknowledge God as the author of

our being, as our sovereign, and our judge; our end and our happiness is then fixed; and we can have but one reasonable design, which is, that by endeavouring to please God we may gain his favour and protection in this world, and arrive at the blissful enjoyment of him in the other: *in whose presence is fulness of joy; and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.* To him, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XVIII.

A PERSUASIVE TO FREQUENT COMMUNION.

1 Cor. xi. 26, 27, 28.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.
Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

My design is, from the consideration of the nature of this sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and of the perpetual use of it, to awaken men to a sense of the great obligation that lies upon them to the more frequent receiving o

it. And, in order to this, I shall take occasion briefly to treat of these four points:

I. Of the perpetuity of this institution; this the apostle signifies, when he says, that by *eating this bread, and drinking this cup, we do show the Lord's death till he come.*

II. Of the obligation that lies upon all Christians to the frequent observance of this institution; this is signified in that expression of the apostle, *as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup.*

III. I shall endeavour to satisfy the objections and scruples which have been raised in the minds of many devout and sincere Christians to the discouraging them from receiving this sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought.

IV. I shall show what preparation of ourselves is necessary in order to our worthy receiving this sacrament.

I. For the perpetuity of this institution, implied in these words: *For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come;* or, *show ye the Lord's death till he come.* In the three verses immediately before, the apostle particularly declares the institution of this sacrament, with the manner and circumstances of it: *For I have received of the Lord, that which I also delivered unto you; that the Lord Jesus, in the same night that he was betrayed took bread, and when he*

had given thanks he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do in remembrance of me. So that the institution is in these words; *this do in remembrance of me.* By which our Lord commanded his disciples, after his death, to repeat these occasions of *taking, breaking,* and *eating the bread,* and *drinking of the cup,* by way of solemn commemoration of him. Now whether this was to be done by them once only, or oftener; and whether by the disciples only, during their lives, or by all Christians afterwards in all successive ages of the Church, is not so certain merely from these words, *Do this in remembrance of me.* But what the apostle adds, puts it out of all doubt, that the institution of this sacrament was intended, not only for the apostles, and for that age; but for all Christians, and for all ages of the Christian church; *for as often as ye eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come:* that is, till the time of his second coming, which will be at the end of the world. So that this sacrament was designed to be a standing commemoration of the passion and death of our Lord till he should come to judgment; and consequently the obligation that lies upon Christians to observe it is perpetual.

The consideration whereof should mightily

strengthen and encourage our hope in eternal life, so often as we partake of this sacrament, since our Lord hath left it as a memorial of himself till he come, to translate his church into Heaven, and as a sure pledge that he will come again at the end of the world, and take us in that glory which he is now gone before to prepare for us.

The same consideration should likewise make us afraid to receive this sacrament unworthily, without due preparation for it, and without worthy effects of it upon our hearts and lives. For as he that partakes worthily of this sacrament, confirms his interest in the gospel: so he that receives it unworthily; that is, without due reverence, and without fruits meet for it; nay, on the contrary, continues to live in sin whilst he commemorates the death of Christ, *who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity*, this man aggravates and seals his own damnation, because he is guilty of the body and blood of Christ, not only by the contempt of it, but by renewing in some sort the cause of his sufferings, and as it were *crucifying to himself afresh the Lord of life and glory, and putting him to an open shame.* But this is by no means a sufficient reason to make men fly from the sacrament; though certainly one of the most powerful arguments in the world to make them forsake their sins.

II. To consider the obligation that lies upon

all Christians to the frequent observance of this institution.

1. We are obliged, in point of indispensable duty, and in obedience to a plain precept of our blessed Saviour, that great lawgiver, *who is able to save and to destroy*, as St. James calls him: he hath bid us *do this*. Now, for a Christian to live in the open neglect of a plain law and institution of Christ, is utterly inconsistent. To such our Lord may say as he did to the Jews, *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*

2. We are likewise obliged frequently to receive the communion in point of interest. The benefits which we expect to be derived and assured to us by this sacrament are all the blessings of the new covenant; the forgiveness of our sins; the assistance of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to perform what is required on our part; the comforts of the same Spirit to encourage us in well doing, and to support us under sufferings; and the glorious reward of eternal life. So that in neglecting this sacrament we neglect our own interest; we deprive ourselves of one of the best means and advantages of confirming and conveying these blessings to us.

3. We are likewise particularly obliged in point of gratitude, to the careful observance of this institution. It was the particular charge given by our Lord, when he was going to lay

down his life for us, *do this in remembrance of me.* The charge of a dying friend, unless it be very difficult and unreasonable, who does not religiously observe? But this is the charge of our best friend (nay, of the greatest friend and benefactor of all mankind) when he was preparing to yield himself up to the worst of temporal deaths, that he might deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal death. Had such a friend, and in such circumstances, bid us do some great thing, would we not have done it? How much more when he hath only said, *do this in remembrance of me;* when he hath only enjoined us, in a thankful commemoration of his sufferings for our sakes, to meet at his table, to remember what he hath done for us, and to resolve to grieve him no more? Can we, without the most horrid ingratitude, neglect this dying charge of our Sovereign, our Saviour! a command so reasonable, so easy, so full of blessings and benefits to the faithful observers of it!

What then should be the cause of all this backwardness which we see in men to so plain, so necessary, and so beneficial a duty? The truth is, men have been greatly discouraged from this sacrament by the unwary pressing and inculcating of two great truths; the danger of the unworthy receiving of this holy sacrament, and the necessity of a due preparation for it.

IH. I propose in the third particular, To endeavour to satisfy the objections and scruples which have been raised in the minds of many devout and sincere Christians, to the discouraging them from receiving this sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought. These objections are chiefly grounded upon what the apostle says in the 27th verse; *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* And again, ver. 29. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.* Upon the mistake and misapplication of these texts have been grounded two objections, which I shall endeavour with all the tenderness and clearness I can, to remove.

1. That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way wholly to refrain from this sacrament, and not receive it at all. But this objection is evidently of no force, if there be (as most certainly there is) as great or greater danger in neglecting this duty: and so, though the danger of unworthy receiving be avoided by not receiving, yet the danger of neglecting a plain institution of Christ is not thereby avoided. Surely of the two it is the greater disrespect wholly to neglect the sacrament than to partake of it without some due qualification. The greatest indisposition that can be for it, is one's being

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known wickedness, before he receives t
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for his sins, to repent of them, and t
God's grace and assistance against them
having received it, continues for some ti
these good resolutions, though after a
he may possibly relapse into the sam
again; this is some kind of restraint
wicked life; and even this righteousness,
is but *as the morning cloud and the early*
which so soon passeth away, is better than
Few can think of coming to the sacra

The sacrament always laid some kind of restraint upon the worst of men; and if it did not wholly reform them, it would at least have some good effect upon them for a time; if it did not make men good, yet it would make them resolve to be so, and leave some good impressions upon their minds.

It is true, indeed, the danger of unworthy receiving is great; but the proper inference and conclusion from hence is not, that men should be deterred from the sacrament, but that they should be affrighted from their sins, and from that wicked course of life which is an habitual indisposition and unworthiness. St. Paul, indeed, truly represents and very much aggravates the danger of unworthy receiving; yet deters not the Corinthians from this sacrament, because they had sometimes come to it without due reverence, but exhorts them to amend what had been amiss, and to come better prepared and disposed for the future. And therefore after that terrible declaration in the text, *Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,* he does not add, therefore let Christians take heed of coming to the sacrament; but, let them come prepared and with due reverence; not as to a common meal, but as to a solemn participation of the body and blood of Christ: *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

piety, or prayer, or reading and hearing
word of God; because there is a propo
able danger in the unworthy and unprofi
use of any of these. *The prayer of the w*
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are not reformed by the doctrine of the go
it is the savour of death; it is deadly to
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as that he who eats and drinks the sacrament unworthily is guilty of a high contempt of Christ, and *eats and drinks his own judgment:* so that the danger of the unworthy performing this sacred action, is no otherwise a reason to any man to abstain from the sacrament, than it is an argument to him to cast off all religion. He that unworthily uses or performs any part of religion is in an evil and dangerous condition; but he that casts off all religion, plungeth himself into a most desperate state; because by so doing he throws off all the means whereby he should be reclaimed. I cannot more fitly illustrate this matter than by this plain similitude; he that eats and drinks intemperately endangers his health and his life, but he that to avoid this danger will not eat at all, I need not tell you what will certainly become of him in a very short space.

There are some conscientious persons who abstain from the sacrament upon an apprehension that the sins which they shall commit afterwards are unpardonable. But this is a great mistake; our Saviour having so plainly declared that all manner of sin shall be forgiven, except blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; such was, ascribing the miracles which our Saviour really wrought by the Spirit of God, to the power of the devil. Indeed, *to sin deliberately*, after so solemn an engagement to the contrary, is a great aggravation o

sin, though not so much as to make it unpardonable. But the neglect of the sacrament is not the way to prevent these sins; on the contrary, the constant receiving it with the best preparation we can, is one of the most effectual means to prevent sin for the future, and to obtain the assistance of God's grace to that end; and if we fall into sin afterwards, we may be renewed by repentance; *for we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins;* and as such is in a very lively manner exhibited to us in this blessed sacrament of his body broken, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins. Can we think that the first Christians, who so frequently received this holy sacrament, did never, after receiving it, fall into any deliberate sin? Undoubtedly, many of them did; but far be it from us to think that such sins were unpardonable, and that so many good men should, because of their careful and conscientious observance of our Lord's institution, unavoidably fall into condemnation.

Such groundless fears and jealousies as these, may be a sign of a good meaning, but they are certainly a sign of an injudicious mind. For if we stand upon these scruples, no man perhaps was ever so worthily prepared to draw near to God in any duty of religion, but there was still some defect in the disposition of his

mind, and the degree of his preparation. If we prepare ourselves as well as we can, this is all God expects. And with respect to our fears of falling into sin afterwards, there is this to be said; that the danger of falling into sin is not prevented by neglecting the sacrament, but increased: because a powerful and probable means of preserving us from sin is neglected. And why should not every sincere Christian, by receiving this sacrament, and renewing his covenant with God, rather hope to be confirmed in goodness, and to receive farther assistances of God's grace and Holy Spirit to strengthen him against sin, and to enable him to subdue it; than trouble himself with fears which are either without ground, or, if they are not, are no sufficient reason to keep him from the sacrament? We cannot surely entertain so unworthy a thought of God and our blessed Saviour, as to imagine that he instituted the sacrament, not for the furtherance of our salvation, but as a snare, and an occasion of our ruin.

All then that can reasonably be inferred from the danger of unworthy receiving, is, that upon this consideration we should be quickened to come to the sacrament with a due preparation of mind, and should so much the more fortify our resolutions of living suitably to that holy covenant which we solemnly renew every time we receive this holy sac-

ment. This consideration ought to conv
us of the absolute necessity of a good life,
not deter us from the use of any means w
may contribute to make us good. There
(as a learned divine says very well) this sa
ment can be neglected by none, but those
do not understand it, and those who are
willing to be tied to their duty, and are af
of being engaged to use their best dilig
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have no reason to fear being in a worse co
tion, since they are already in so bad a sta

I proceed to the

Second objection, which was this;
so much preparation being required to
worthy receiving, the more timorous sor
Christians can never think themselves
enough qualified for so sacred an action.

For a full answer to this objection, I obse

1. That every degree of imperfection in
preparation for this sacrament, is not a s
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proach God's altar? There is not a man
earth that lives, and sins not. The grac
the best are imperfect; and every im

tion in goodness is an imperfection in the disposition and preparation of our minds for this holy sacrament: but if we heartily repent of our sins, and sincerely resolve to obey the terms of the gospel, we are in the main qualified to partake of this holy sacrament; and the way for us to be more fit, is to receive it frequently, that hereby new strength and virtue may be continually derived to us for the purifying our hearts, and enabling us to run the ways of God's commandments with more constancy and delight. The way to *grow in grace*, and to be *strengthened with all might in the inner man*, and to *abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which by Christ Jesus are to the praise and glory of God*, is with care and conscience to use those means which God hath appointed for this end. That excellent degree of goodness which men would have to fit them for the sacrament, is not to be had but by the use of it. And therefore it is a preposterous thing for men to insist upon having the end before they will use the means that may further them in the obtaining it.

I observe, secondly, that the total want of a due preparation, though it render us unfit at present to receive this sacrament, yet does it by no means excuse our neglect of it. One fault may draw on another, but can never excuse it. It is our great fault that we are *wholly* unprepared, and no man can claim

any benefit by his fault. A total want of preparation, and an absolute unworthiness in any, is impenitency; a resolution to continue a bad man, not to quit his lusts, and to break off that wicked course he hath lived in. But is this any excuse for the neglect of our duty, that we will not fit ourselves for the doing it?

I add, thirdly, That the proper inference from a total want of due preparation for the sacrament, is, not to cast off all thoughts of receiving it, but immediately to set about the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. For if this be true, that they who are absolutely unprepared ought not to receive the sacrament, nor can do it with any benefit; nay, by doing it in such a manner, render their condition much worse; this is a most forcible argument to amendment of life: there is nothing reasonable in this case, but immediately to resolve upon a better course, that so we may no longer provoke God by the wilful neglect of so great and necessary a duty: and we wilfully neglect it, so long as we wilfully refuse to fit and qualify ourselves for the due performance of it. Let us view the thing in a like case; a pardon is graciously offered to a rebel, he declines to accept it, excusing himself because he is not worthy of *it*. And why is he not worthy? Because he resolves to be a rebel, and then his pardon will do him no good, but be an aggravation

of his crime. Very true; and it will be no less an aggravation, that he refuseth it for such a reason, and under a pretence of modesty does the most impudent thing in the world. This is just the case; and in this case there is but one thing reasonable to be done, and that is, for a man to make himself capable of the benefit as soon as he can, and thankfully to accept of it. So that whether our want of preparation be total, or only to some degree, it is every way unreasonable.

Let me, in the fourth place, consider, What preparation of ourselves is necessary to the worthy receiving of the sacrament. Which gives me occasion to explain the apostle's meaning in the last part of the text, *let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. Let a man examine himself;* that is, consider well with himself what a sacred action he is going about, and what behaviour becomes him when he is celebrating this sacrament instituted by our Lord in memorial of his body and blood, that is, of his death and passion: and if heretofore he has been guilty of any disorder and irreverence, let him censure and judge himself for it, be sensible of and sorry for his fault, and be careful to avoid it for the future; and having thus *examined himself, let him eat* of that bread, and drink of *that cup.* This, I think, is the plain sense of the apostle's discourse. Not but that it is a

practice very much to be countenanced and encouraged, because it is of great use for us by way of preparation for the sacrament, to examine ourselves in a larger sense than in all probability the apostle here intended: I mean, to examine our past lives, and the actions of them, in order to a sincere repentance of all our errors and miscarriages, and to fix us in the steady purpose and resolution of a better life. Particularly, when we expect to have the forgiveness of our sins sealed to us, we should lay aside all enmity and thoughts of revenge, should heartily forgive those that have offended us, and put in practice that universal love and charity which is represented to us by this holy communion. And to this purpose we are earnestly exhorted in the public office of the communion, by way of due preparation and disposition for it, To repent us truly of our sins past, to amend our lives, and to be in perfect charity with all men, that so we may be meet partakers of these holy mysteries.

How much time every person should allot for this work of examination is matter of prudence; and as it need not, so neither indeed can it be precisely determined. Some have greater reason to spend more time upon this work than others; I mean, those whose accounts are heavier; because they have long neglected themselves: some also have more leisure and freedom for it, from their easy con-

dition and circumstances in the world; and therefore are obliged to allow a greater portion of time for the exercises of piety and devotion. In general, no man ought to do a work of so great moment and concernment slightly and perfunctorily. And in this, as in all other actions, the end is principally to be regarded. Now the end of examining ourselves is to understand our state and condition, and to reform whatever we find amiss in ourselves. And provided this end be obtained, the circumstances of the means are less considerable: whether more or less time be allowed to this work it matters not so much, as to make sure that the work be thoroughly done.

And I speak thus cautiously in this matter, because some pious persons err perhaps on the stricter hand; and unless they can gain so much time to set apart for a solemn preparation, they will refrain from the sacrament at that time, though otherwise they be habitually prepared. This I doubt not proceeds from a pious mind; but as the apostle says in another case about the sacrament, *shall I praise them in this? I praise them not.* For when all is done, the best preparation for the sacrament is the general care and endeavour of a good life; and he that is thus prepared may receive at any time when opportunity is offered, though he had no particular foresight of that opportunity. And I think in that case such a one

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solemn preparation every time they receive the sacrament. The great necessity that lies upon us, is, to live as becomes Christians, and then we can never be absolutely unprepared.

But because the examination of ourselves is a thing so very useful, and the time which men are wont to set apart for their preparation for the sacrament is so advantageous an opportunity for the practice of it; therefore I cannot but very much commend those who take this occasion to search and try their ways, and to call themselves to a more solemn account of their actions. It ought to be done some time, and I know no fitter time for it than this. And perhaps some would never find time to recollect themselves, and to take the condition of their souls into serious consideration, were it not upon this solemn occasion.

To conclude: The sum of what I have said is this, that, supposing a person to be habitually prepared by a religious disposition of mind, and the general course of a good life, this more solemn and actual preparation is not always necessary: and it is better, when there is an opportunity to receive without it, than not to receive at all. But the greater our actual preparation is, the better. For no man can examine himself too often, and understand the state of his soul too well, and exercise repentance, and renew the resolutions of a good life too frequently. And there is perhaps no fitt

opportunity for the doing of all this, than when we approach the Lord's table, there to commemorate his death, and to renew our covenant with him to live as becomes the gospel.

SERMON XIX.

THE NATURE AND INFLUENCE OF THE PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Pet. i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

In handling these words, I shall consider,

I. The promises here spoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.*

II. The influences which these promises ought to have upon us; *that by these ye might be made partakers of a divine nature.*

As to the promises here spoken of, it will be proper to consider,

First, What they are.

Secondly, Why they are said to be exceeding *great and precious.*

Thirdly, The tenor of them.

Fourthly, When men may be said to have a right to them, so as they may apply them to themselves.

First, By the promises here spoken of, the apostle, no doubt, intends those great and excellent promises which Christ hath made to us in the Gospel, the principal whereof are these three:

1. The promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance. We have full and clear promises made to us, that if we believe the Gospel, forsake our sins, and amend our wicked lives, all that is past shall be forgiven us; Christ having died to obtain for us remission of sins. The light of nature, upon consideration of the mercy and goodness of God, gave men great hopes, that upon their repentance God would forgive their sins: but they were doubtful of this, and therefore used expiatory sacrifices to appease the offended Deity. The Jewish religion allowed of expiation only for involuntary transgressions. If men sinned wilfully, there was no sacrifice appointed by the law for such sins. But the grace of the Gospel justifies us from the greatest sins, upon our faith and sincere repentance. So St. Paul tells the Jews, Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren,* that through this man is *preached unto you* the forgiveness of sins: and *by him all that* believe are justified from all *things, from which ye* could not be justified by

the law of Moses. There was no general promise of pardon, nor way of expiation under the law; perfect remission of sins, is clearly revealed and ascertained to us only by the Gospel.

2. Another of the promises made us in the Gospel is, that of God's Holy Spirit to assist our obedience. Our blessed Saviour hath promised, that *our heavenly Father will give his holy Spirit to them that ask him.* It is true, indeed, that there was a promise of such gifts of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles and Christians of the first ages, as are not to be expected now the Christian religion is established in the world. But the Spirit of God still concurs with the Gospel to excite us to, and assist us in that which is good. And though the manner of its operation be so very secret, as not to be accounted for by us, yet the effects of it are very sensible; and this influence of God's Holy Spirit is common to all Christians in all ages of the world. This proposition is universally true, *If any man hath not the Spirit of God, he is none of his.*

In the first times of christianity, when men were strongly possessed with the prejudices of other religions in which they had been brought up, more outward means of conviction were then necessary, as well as a more powerful internal operation of the Spirit of God upon their minds, to bear down those prejudices. But now, as the principles of religion are mor

gradually instilled by the gentle degrees of pious instruction and education; so the Spirit of God concurs with these means in a way, which is better suited to our reason, and offers less violence to our nature. So that the promise of God's Holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the necessity and circumstances of our present state requires.

3. A third promise in the Gospel is, that of eternal life to reward and crown our obedience. This St. John ii. 25. speaks of as the great promise of the Gospel: *This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life.* Upon this account the new covenant of the Gospel is preferred before the old covenant of the law, because it is *established upon better promises.* All the special promises of the law were of temporal good things, and these were the great encouragements to obedience under that imperfect dispensation: but now godliness hath not only the *promise of the life that now is, but of that which is to come.* 1 Tim. iv. 8. The Gospel hath clearly revealed to us a happy state of immortality after this life, of which men had before but very obscure and doubtful apprehensions: so the apostle tells us, 2 Tim. i. 10. *That it is now made manifest, by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light* through the Gospel. Holy men had hopes of it before; but they had no

distinct apprehensions of it; no such full assurance concerning it, no such clear and express promises of it, as the Gospel hath given us.

These are the three eminent promises of the Gospel, and in all probability those which the apostle here calls *exceeding great and precious;* which brings me to consider in the

Second place, Why they are so called. If we consider the condition that mankind was in when God was pleased to make these gracious declarations, we shall see great reason to set a high value upon every one of these promises. *All flesh had corrupted its ways: the whole world was guilty before God;* and was liable to all that misery which the sinner had reason to apprehend from the justice of the Almighty. We had forfeited that happiness to which our immortal nature was designed, and were *without strength* to recover ourselves out of our sad condition. But the promises of the Gospel offer us relief, and thereby obviate all the difficulties and discouragements we lay under.

The gracious promise of pardon frees us from guilt, and secures us from the punishment, which our guilty consciences so much dreaded. Without this promise, mankind would have been under the greatest doubts and discouragements; for when we are afraid our sins are greater than will be forgiven us

we are apt to fall into despair, which is an effectual bar to repentance.

The promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit to enable us to do our duty, fully answers all the objections from our own weakness, and the power of temptation. We may do all things *through Christ strengthening us*, and how weak soever we are of ourselves, *we are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. The Spirit of God dwells in all those who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to assist those who comply with his blessed motions, and who vigorously put forth their own endeavours.

The promise of eternal life answers all the difficulties of our obedience, and sets us above whatever the world can threaten us withall for our constancy to God and his truth. A wise man will be content to suffer or to quit any thing upon terms of far greater advantage: and what greater consideration can be offered to encourage our obedience, than an eternity of happiness? So that the apostle had reason to call these, *exceeding great and precious promises;* so precious, that if any one of them had been wanting, our redemption and recovery had either been absolutely impossible, or extremely difficult. I proceed in the

Third place, To consider the tenor of these *promises;* that is, whether God has made *hem* absolutely to us, without requiring any

thing to be done on our part, or upon certain conditions to be performed by us. And, I think, it may safely be affirmed, that they are made conditionally.

Concerning the promise of the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, the Scripture takes notice of two conditions: First, That we beg it earnestly of God; this our Saviour expresses by asking, seeking, knocking; which signifies the importunity of our requests; *our Heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that* thus *ask it.* Secondly, That we improve and make use of the grace which he affords us; *to him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seems to have;* that is, to him who useth that grace, and those advantages which God affords him, more shall be given; but from him who makes no use of them, and therefore is as if he had them not, shall be taken away that which he but seems to have.

Concerning the pardon of sins; the Scripture plainly suspends that upon the general condition of repentance, and the change of our lives; *Repent, that your sins may be forgiven you;* and upon the condition of our forgiving others; *if ye forgive men their trespasses, then will your Heavenly Father also forgive you;* but if ye forgive not men *their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*, says our Saviour, Matt. vi. 14, 15.

And for the promise of eternal life; fai

repentance, and perseverance in well-doing, are every where in Scripture made the condition of it; *He that believes*, says our Saviour; that is, he that effectually assents to the doctrine of Christ, and is so persuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, *shall be saved*. We have here obedience included in the Scripture notion of faith; and elsewhere expressly made the condition of our eternal salvation: thus, Heb. v. 9. Christ is said to be the *author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;* thereby implying, that none shall be saved by Christ, but those that obey the Gospel. Heb. xii. 14. *Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.* Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality,* God will give *eternal life; but to them that are contentious and obey not the truth,* (that is, the Gospel) *but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.* I come in the

Fourth place to consider, When men may be said to have a right to these promises, so as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themselves. When a man hath truly repented of his sins, so as to forsake them, and lead a new life; when he does from his heart forgive those that have offended him, hath laid down all animosity against them, and thoughts of revenge; then hath he a right to the promise

of pardon, and may apply to himself in particular, what the Scripture says in general, that *God will blot out all his transgressions, and remember his iniquities no more.*—When a man constantly and earnestly implores the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, is ready to yield to the motions of it, and faithfully makes use of the strength which God affords him; then he may expect the continuance of his grace, and further degrees of it.—When a man makes it the constant and sincere endeavour of his life to please God, and to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless;* and is effectually taught by his grace to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world;* then he may with comfort and joy wait *for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;* then he may with confidence depend upon God, in sure and certain hope of that eternal life, which he that cannot lie, hath promised.—When he can say, with St. Paul, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;* then he may likewise triumph, as St. Paul did, *henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day.*

Upon these terms, and in these cases, men may, upon good grounds, apply to themselves *these exceeding great and precious promises* of

the Gospel; and so far as they are doubtful of the performance of the conditions which the Gospel requires, so far they must necessarily question their right to the blessings promised: but to apply any promise to ourselves, before we find the condition within us, is not faith, but either fancy or presumption.

I have now done with the first general head; namely, the promises which are here spoken of.

II. We will consider the influence which these promises ought to have upon us: they *are given us, that by these we might be partakers of a divine nature;* that is, be of a divine temper and diposition, have our corrupt natures rectified and purged from all sinful lusts and irregular passions; from all vicious and corrupt affections; and therefore it follows in the text, *having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; and, besides this, giving all diligence; add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.* So that we are made *partakers of a divine nature,* as the apostle here explains it, these two ways: by cleansing ourselves from the lusts of the flesh, which is here called the *corruption,* or defilement, which is in *the world through lust*; and, by a diligent endeavour after all Christian graces and vir-

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love of the brethren, and universal charity a
good-will.

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great promises of the Gospel upon the hea
and lives of men, St. Paul fully declar
2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore these promis*
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ness of God, and all those other perfections
the divine nature, which are comprehende
under the term holiness. This is what th
apostle here calls *partaking of a divine nature*
or, as our blessed Saviour expresseth it, *to b*
perfect as our Father which is in heaven is per
fect.

To this the Gospel designs to raise us;

one of the great instruments whereby this is effected, are those *exceeding great and precious promises* which I have insisted upon; and they are capable of effecting it these two ways.

First, By way of internal efficacy and assistance. This influence the promise of God's Holy Spirit hath upon us, inclining us to that which is good, and enabling us to do it. The Holy Spirit is promised to us, in commiseration of the weakness which we have contracted; to help us, who are without strength, out of that miserable state into which by wilful transgression we are fallen; *to quicken us who are dead in trespasses and sins;* (as the Scripture expresses the condition of unregenerate persons) to *raise us to a new life;* to cherish this principle of spiritual life, which is commonly weak at first, and to carry it through all oppositions; to excite us continually to our duty, and to enable us to perform the most difficult parts of obedience, such as are most contrary to our natural inclinations; to bear down the strength of sin and temptation, and in all our conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil, to make us victorious; and, in a word, to be a principle within us more powerful than the lusts and inclinations of our evil hearts, than the most obstinate habits of sin, and than all the temptations and terrors of sense. So that, if we will make use of this assistance which God

affords us, we need not despair of success; for our strength will continually increase, and the violence of our lusts will be abated: God will give us more grace, and we shall *walk from strength to strength;* and our path will be (as Solomon says of the way of the righteous) *as the light which shines more and more unto the perfect day.*

Secondly, The promises of the Gospel are apt likewise to have a mighty influence upon us by way of external motive and argument; to engage us to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.* For,

1. A full pardon of what is past is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our duty, and a forcible argument to keep us to it for the future. For since God, who has been so highly affronted by us, is most willing and ready to forgive us; it ought to heighten our love of him, to melt us into sorrow for, and repentance of our sins, and make us most firmly resolve never more to offend that merciful Being, who is so slow to punish and so ready to forgive; it should effectually engage us to a dutiful, constant, and cheerful obedience to his holy laws, lest by our wilful violation of them, we should aggravate our condemnation. Now that by the tender mercies of our God, we are *made whole*, we should be infinitely afraid to sin any more, lest worse things come

to us; lest we relapse into a more incurable state, and bring a heavier load of guilt and misery upon ourselves.

2. The promise of God's grace is likewise a very powerful argument to holiness and goodness; engaging us to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,* that our minds may be a fit temple for the Holy Ghost, which will not dwell in an impure soul; and encouraging us hereto by this consideration, that we have so unerring a guide to direct us, so powerful an assistant *to strengthen us with all might in the inner man,* to stand by us in all our conflicts with sin and Satan, and make us (as the apostle expresses it) *more than conquerors* over all our spiritual enemies. For though we be weak, and our lusts strong; our enemies many, and temptations violent; yet we need not be disheartened, while we know that *God is with us,* and the *grace of his Holy Spirit sufficient for us.* So that when we see all the enemies of our salvation drawn up in array against us, we may comfort ourselves, as Hezekiah comforted the people when they were afraid of the mighty force of the king of Assyria, *Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed, for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him. With him* is an arm of flesh, but with *us is the Lord our* God, to help us, and to fight *for us.* This is the case of every Christian

the force that is against us is finite and limited, but the Almighty God is on our side, and fights for us; and every one of us may say with St. Paul, *I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.*

3. The promise of eternal life and happiness, if duly considered, hath a mighty force in it to take us off from the love and practice of sin, and to encourage our obedience and *patient continuance in well doing.* The assurance of enjoying unspeakable and endless happiness in another world, and of escaping extreme and eternal misery, one would think, could not fail to bear down before us all the difficulties and discouragements in the way of our duty. If this make no impression upon us, it will be in vain to use any other arguments: if neither the hopes of perfect and perpetual happiness, on the one hand; nor the dread of eternal sufferings, on the other; will prevail upon us to *cease to do evil* and to *resolve to be good,* there is no hope that any words can be used, any arguments offered, to work upon us. He that is not to be allured by such hopes, nor terrified by such fears, is proof against all the force of persuasion in the world.

I have done with the two things I proposed to consider. All that now remains is to make some useful reflections upon what has been said; as,

First, If we expect the blessings and bene-

fits of *these exceeding great and precious promises*, we must be careful to perform the conditions which are indispensably required on our parts. It is a great mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, to imagine, that the Christian religion is only a declaration of God's good will to us, without any expectation of duty from us; this is an error into which one would think hardly any could fall, who have the liberty to read the Bible, and who attend to what they read.

The three great promises of the Gospel are very expressly contained in our Saviour's first Sermon upon the Mount. There we find the promise of blessedness often repeated; but always made upon certain conditions plainly required on our parts; as, repentance, humility, righteousness, mercy, peaceableness, meekness, patience. Forgiveness of sins is likewise promised; but only to those who make a penitent acknowledgment of them; who ask forgiveness for them; and are ready to grant that forgiveness to others, which they beg of God for themselves. The gift of God's Holy Spirit is also there promised; but it is upon condition of our earnest prayer to God.

St. Paul gives us the sum of the Gospel in very few and plain words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that salvation which is there offered to all men: The grace of God, says he, which bringeth salvation, hath

appeared unto all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. And then adds, *These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority;* intimating, that though men were very averse to this doctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great earnestness, and those who opposed and despised it, to be severely rebuked; and with great reason, because the contrary doctrine most effectually defeats the whole design of the Christian Religion.

Secondly, From hence we learn, that if the promises of the Gospel have not this effect upon us, to make us *partakers of a divine nature,* it is our own fault. God is always ready to do his part, if we fail not in ours. There is a divine power and efficacy goes along with the Gospel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of men, where they put no bar to it: but if they obstinately hold out against the force of truth; if they will resist the motions, and quench the light of the blessed Spirit, it will be withdrawn from them. The Gospel would raise us to the perfection of virtue; and the promises of it are admirably

fitted to relieve the infirmities of human nature, *to renew us after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness*, to take us off from sin, to allure us to goodness, and to assist and encourage us in the practice of it; but if we will not comply with the gracious design of God in the Gospel, and suffer these promises to have their due influence upon us; we wilfully deprive ourselves of all the blessings and benefits of it; *we reject the counsel of God against ourselves, and receive his grace in vain.*

Lastly, If the promises of the Christian Religion are apt in their own nature, to make us like to God, to make us *good, just, merciful, patient, and holy in all manner of conversation; to purge us from our iniquities, and to make us a peculiar and excellent people, zealous of good works;* if this be the proper tendency of the Gospel and the promises of it, how does it upbraid the degenerate state of the Christian world at this day, which so abounds in all kinds of wickedness and impiety? We are so far from that pitch of goodness and virtue, to which the Christian Religion designs to raise us, and which the apostle here calls the *divine nature*, that a great part of us are degenerated into beasts and devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy lusts; indulging ourselves in *malice* and hatred, strife and discord, revenge *and* cruelty, sedition and disturbance of the *public* peace, as if the grace of God

never appeared to us, to teach us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all those who call themselves Christians, to demean themselves in a proper manner, for the honour of their religion, and the salvation of their souls; to have their conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ; and by departing from the vicious practices of this present evil world, to do what in them lies to prevent the judgments of God which hang over us; or, if they cannot do that, to *save themselves from this untoward generation.*

SERMON XX.

ON SINCERITY.

JOHN i. 47.

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

THE whole nation of the Jews were Israelites by natural descent, being the seed of Jacob or Israel; but in a special and more excellent sense, none were esteemed the true posterity of Israel, but those who resembled this father of that nation in the sincerity of his piety, and the simplicity of his temper and disposition; so that to be an Israelite indeed, is to be

ruly honest man, without fraud and guile, thout any arts of hypocrisy and deceit.

In speaking of this virtue of sincerity, which the highest character and commendation of good man, I shall consider it

First, As it respects God.

Secondly, As it respects man.

First, As it respects God, it imports the sincerity of our piety; that we heartily believe, fear, and honour God; and that our outward expressions of piety and obedience, are the genuine issue of our inward apprehensions of him and affections towards him. And because sincerity is the very heart and substance of religion, it is fit that we should particularly enquire into its properties, that we may know when we have it; I shall mention a few of these properties.

1. Our piety is then sincere, when the chief reasons and motives of it are religious, that is, regard God and another world, in opposition to men, and to our present worldly interest. On the contrary, that is an unsincere piety, to which we are moved merely by the regard of men, and the consideration of some temporal advantages.

2. A sincere piety will be rooted in the heart, and be a living principle within us. Unless there be piety in our hearts all outward acts of it are hypocrisy, a picture of religion, and a form of godliness, without the life and power of it.

3. A third evidence of a sincere piety is when men are religious in private as well as in public. He is truly devout, who is so not only in the church, but in his family and in his closet, where he has no witness but God and his own soul. He is really honest, who will keep his word, and perform his promise, when no proof can be made of it, and no law compel him to it. He is sincerely just who will not wrong another, though he could do it with all secresy and safety.

And indeed there is scarce any act of piety and virtue, the sincerity of which may not by this evidence be known by us: as, on the contrary, he may for certain conclude himself an hypocrite, who is not the same in the presence of God only, and his own conscience, that he is in the sight of men.

4. Another evidence of a sincere piety is a constant tenor of goodness in the course of our lives. The habits of any known sin, the deliberate neglect of our duties, and even single acts of more heinous crimes, will bring in question our sincerity. He is not sincerely good who doth not seriously endeavour to be as good as he can, and who doth not make use of that assistance which God is ready to *afford*, to all the purposes, though not of a *perfect*, yet of a sincere obedience to his laws.

5. Another evidence of a sincere piety is that our obedience to God be uniform and

universal, equally respecting all the laws of God, and every part of our duty. St. James determines, that *he who keeps the whole law, saving that he offends in one point, is guilty of all;* that is, is not sincere in his obedience to the rest.

It is very possible that men may be devout and zealous in religion, very scrupulous in the service of God, and yet, because of their palpable defects in points of justice and honesty, of meekness and humility, of peace and charity, may be gross and odious hypocrites.

If we would approve the integrity of our hearts, and evidence to ourselves the sincerity of our obedience, we ought impartially to regard all the laws of God, and every part of our duty; and if we do not, our heart is not upright with God. It is observable, that sincerity in Scripture, is often called by the name of integrity and perfection: because it is integrated and made up of all the parts of our duty.

6. The last evidence I shall mention of the sincerity of our religion is, that it holds out against persecution. This is a trial to which God doth not always call his faithful servants; but they are always to be prepared for it in their minds. This our Saviour makes the great mark of a true disciple: *If any man*, saith he, *will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* This is a cer-

tain sign, that men have received the word into good ground, and are well rooted in their religion, when they are not shaken by those fierce assaults: *For many* (as our Saviour tells us) *hear the word, and with joy receive it; but having not root in themselves, they endure but for a while; and when persecution and tribulation ariseth because of the word, presently, they are offended.* So that constancy to our religion, in case of danger and suffering for it, is the best proof of our sincerity.

II. I proceed now to the second consideration of sincerity as it regards man. And so it signifies a simplicity of mind and manners, a singleness of heart, a freedom from all false appearances and disguises of ours, in word or action: it is to speak as we think, is to do what we pretend and profess; to perform what we promise; and in a word really to be what we would seem to be.

We are not, indeed, obliged to tell every man all our mind; but we are never to declare any thing contrary to it. We may conceal as much of ourselves as prudence requires, but we must not make a false appearance of what we are not, either by word or action. Contrary to this virtue is, I fear, most of that compliment which is current in conversation; and which for the most part is nothing but words to supply the emptiness of discourse, and a pretence to that kindness and esteem for per

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able discovery of his good qualities, but endeavours rather really to be, than to seem religious; gives his alms privately; prays to God in secret; makes no appearance of religion, but in such fruits and effects as cannot be hid; in the silent virtues of humility, meekness, patience, peace, and charity; in governing his passions and bridling his tongue, in abstaining from every word and action that may be to the prejudice of his neighbour. It is a very ill sign if a man blow a trumpet before his good works, and call aloud, as it were, to men to take notice of his piety, and to *come and see his zeal for the Lord of Hosts.* Such a man may have some real goodness in him; but he is as the hypocrites are, and does as like one as is possible, and greatly brings in question the sincerity of his religion; and with the sincerity of our piety towards God, let us join simplicity and integrity of manners in our conversation with men. Let us strictly charge ourselves to use truth and plainness in all our words and doings; let our tongue be ever the interpreter of our minds, and our actions exactly agreeable to our purpose and intentions.

Among the many instances of the great corruption of the age in which we live, the general want of sincerity in conversation is none of the least. Men's words are hardly any *signification* of their thoughts; and if any one *measures* his words by his heart, and speak as

he thinks, and do not express more kindness to every man than is usually had for any man, he can hardly escape the censure of rudeness and want of breeding.

It is said indeed, in justification of the complimenting phrase, that there is no deceit in it, so long as we know one another's meaning: "Words are like money," when the current value of them is understood, no man is cheated by them. It is, however, a just matter of complaint, that sincerity and plainness are out of fashion, and our language is running into a lie; that men have almost perverted the use of speech, and made words to signify nothing; that the greatest part of the conversation of mankind and of their mutual intercourse, is little else but a course of dissimulation. *They bend their tongues, like their bow for lies,* saith the prophet Jeremiah, *but have no courage for the truth upon the earth. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit. One speaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in his* heart *he lieth in wait. Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord; and shall not my soul be avenged* on *such a nation as this?*

Such were the manners of the people of Israel at that time, which were both the forerunner and the cause of those terrible calami

ties that befel them afterwards. And this character agrees but too well to the present age: for which reason there is the greater need to recommend to us, the virtue of sincerity, *that truth and righteousness may return, and glory may dwell in our land; that God may show his mercy upon us, and grant us his salvation; and righteousness and peace may kiss each other.* To this end give me leave to offer these following considerations.

1. That sincerity is the highest commendation, the very best character that can be given of any man; it is the foundation of all virtue, the soul of all piety and goodness: it is in scripture called perfection, and throughout the Bible, the greatest strictness is laid upon it; it is spoken of as the sum and comprehension of all religion; *only fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth,* says Joshua, xxiv. 14. How particularly acceptable it is to God, David remarks, 1 Chron. xxix. 17. *I know, says he, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness:* and again, Psalm li. 6. *Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.*

To this disposition of mind, the promises of divine favour and blessing are particularly made. Psalm xv. 1, 2. *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth from his heart.* Psalm xxxii. 2. Blessed is the man unto

whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

And it is observable, that this character of Nathaniel here given by our Saviour, is the only full and perfect commendation that, according to what we read, was ever given by him of any one. He commends some acts of piety and virtue in others; as St. Peter's confession of him, the faith of the Centurion, and of the woman that was healed by touching the hem of his garment, the charity of the woman that cast her two mites into the treasury; but he here gives the particular character of a good man, when he says of Nathaniel, that he *was an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile*: and the apostle mentions this quality, as the chief ingredient in the character of the best man that ever was, our blessed Saviour, *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*

2. Without sincerity, all the piety and obedience we can profess will not be accepted, and we shall certainly lose its reward. Whatever we do in the service of God, whatever our outward obedience may be to his laws, if it is not animated by sincerity, it is like a sacrifice without a heart, an abomination to the Lord.

3. Insincerity is a very foolish thing; it aims at cheating others, but, in truth, is deceiving ourselves. No man would flatter a

dissemble, did he believe he were discovered, and this is just the case of every hypocrite; all the disagreement between his tongue and his thoughts, his actions and his heart, is open to that eye from which nothing can be hid: *for the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

4. Truth and sincerity have all the advantages of appearance, and many more. If the show of any thing be good, I am sure that the reality of it is better; and the readiest way for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would seem to be. Besides, it is many times as troublesome to make good the pretence of a good quality as to have it: and if a man has it not, it is ten to one but he is discovered to want it, and then all his labour to seem to have it, is lost. There is something unnatural in painting, which a skilful eye easily distinguishes from the true complexion. It is hard to act a part long; a dissembler must be always upon his guard, must watch himself carefully that he do not contradict his own pretence; for, as he acts an unnatural part, he must put a continual force and restraint upon himself. Insincerity is a very troublesome things to manage; it finds so many things to attend to, so many ends, bring together, as makes life a very perple and intricate thing. A liar had need of a

memory, lest he contradict at one time what he said at another. But truth is always consistent with itself, and needs nothing to help it out. He that acts sincerely hath the easiest task in the world; he follows nature, and therefore is put to no trouble and care about his words and actions: he needs not invent any pretences before hand, nor make excuses afterwards for any thing he hath said or done.

Add to all this, that sincerity is the most compendious wisdom, and an excellent instrument for the speedy dispatch of business: it creates confidence in those we have to deal with, whereas falsehood brings a man under an everlasting suspicion, so that he is not believed when he speaks truth, nor trusted when perhaps he means honestly; he who hath once forfeited the reputation of his integrity, is set fast, and nothing will then serve his turn; neither truth, nor falsehood.

God seems in great wisdom to have hid from men of false and dishonest minds the wonderful advantages of truth and integrity to the prosperity even of our worldly affairs. Were such persons wise enough to discern this, they would be honest out of very knavery; and therefore the justice of the divine Providence hath hid this truest point of wisdom, that bad men might not be upon equal terms with the just and upright, and serve their designs by honest and lawful means.

Indeed, if a man were only to deal in t

world for a day, it were then no great matter (as to the concernments of this world,) if he spent his reputation at once, and ventured it at one throw: but if he be to continue in the world, and would prosper in it, let him use truth and sincerity in all his words and actions. It is the observation of Solomon, Prov. xii. 19. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.* That man hath profited much in the school of wisdom, who valueth truth and sincerity according to their worth. Every one readily grants them to be great virtues, and arguments of a generous mind; but the generality of men can hardly believe that there is so much of true wisdom in them; and that they so much promote our interest in this world, as I doubt not they will by experience be generally found to do.

5. Lastly, It cannot appear worth our while to dissemble, if we will but consider the shortness, and especially the uncertainty of our lives. Why should any man by dissembling his judgment, or acting contrary to it, incur at once the displeasure of God, and the discontent of his own mind? especially if we reflect that all our dissimulation shall one day be made manifest, and published on the open theatre of the world, before God, angels, and men, to our everlasting shame and confusion: all disguises and vizards will then be pluck-

now covered which shall not then be rev
nor hid, which shall not then be known.

Let us therefore be now what we wo
glad to be found in that day, when a
tences shall be examined, and the close
pocrisy of all men shall be laid open;
the secrets of all hearts shall be dis
and all the hidden works of darkness
vealed, and all our thoughts, words, a
tions be brought to a strict and sever
and censured by that impartial and in
judgment of God, which is according to
in the day when God shall judge the sec
men by Jesus Christ.

To whom, with the Father and the

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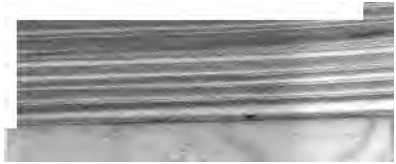

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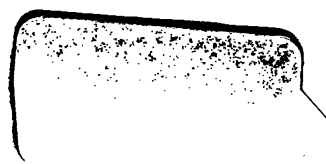

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